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Old and New
Certainty of the Gospel

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

A STUDY OF THE SAVIOUR IN THE NEWER LIGHT.

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Old and New Certainty of the Gospel

A Sketch

BY

ALEXANDER ROBINSON, M.A., B.D.

AUTHOR OF

"A STUDY OF THE SAVIOUR IN THE NEWER LIGHT"

MINISTER FORMERLY OF THE PARISH OF KILMUN, NOW OF THE
INDEPENDENT CONGREGATION AT CRIEFF

WILLIAMS & NORGATE

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Dedicated to

MY CONGREGATION AT CRIEFF

*Without committing any of them to any views here
expressed, but gratefully appreciating their eminent
openmindedness, and their readiness to recognise
honourable intention in those who are eager on
behalf of truth.*

P R E F A C E.

THIS sketch-presentation of the gospel message and of kindred subjects is a second contribution which I respectfully offer to that reconstructive theological study of which many earnest persons find a need in the present day. While seeking to take account of the undeniable discoveries made by modern investigation and reflection, it claims to be in union with the true essence of the traditional doctrine, and is, generally, conservative in attitude. It is thus in agreement with its predecessor, which was first published with the claim of being admissible within the national Church of Scotland, after I had been for nine years a preacher in the service of that Church.

An explanation—possibly an apology—is due for the sense in which the word ‘Literalism’ is used in my pages here. ‘Literalism’ is approved as indicating, and perhaps most naturally indicates, a particular method of interpreting an author’s meaning. Here, however, it is used to indicate a particular presupposition applied to the search for truth itself. More exactly, it is here used to denote a certain thought or belief in relation to the Bible and the traditional creeds, as vehicles of sacred truth. What that thought or belief is, I explain in the first chapter. It is a serious force in human life, and requires a name. If it has yet no name in universal acceptance, that in no way disproves its importance, any more than is the case with certain forces which

are now acknowledged as affecting our bodily lives, and yet until recently were neither named nor recognised. Whatever is the proper word to use, there is no denying the existence of the thing itself. I have tried to find an accepted word that is better than the one which I have adopted; and, while I have found none that seems to me so good, I am ready to receive thankfully any better that may be suggested. 'Literalism' has this advantage, that it implies no want of loyalty, on the part of those who use it, towards the Bible, or even, in proper degree, towards the historical creeds, but only deprecates a particular thought as to the way in which these possess their sacred element.

A question of inestimable gravity confronts every thoughtful person in the present day, namely, whether Literalism is indeed the infallible guide to sacred knowledge; in other words, whether it has indeed the right to humiliate faith and hope, stretch and grow as they may. That question is noticed in the following pages, in subordination to the main questions of the book, namely, What is the Gospel? and, How is it assured to us?

The justification for the public appearance of this little work is that those who have learned of a great deliverance are bound to spread the knowledge of it. The writer is as keenly alive as any critic is likely to be, to the sublimity of the subject and to suggestions of presumption in attempts to deal with it; but in the setting forth of the truths with which these pages are concerned, an author is himself of no more account than is the clinging figure that calls out to others eagerly and joyously in discovery of a firm rock of safety.

July 1900.

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DEFINITION

The word "PERCEPTION" is used in the following pages as meaning :—

The act of knowing through a sense, involving a contribution of individual thought ; admitting of inaccuracy in consequence of the immaturity of all individual thought, but trustworthy when the result of one perceiving act is sufficiently compared with that of another.

OLD AND NEW CERTAINTY OF THE GOSPEL.

CHAPTER I.

SACRED REALITY AND THE LIGHT THAT SHINES ON IT.

THE metaphor of Light has been applied by general consent to the knowledge of sacred things. As applied with propriety, it indicates a defining agency for our inborn perception of the Divine Life. 'Revelation' arouses that perception; 'light' maintains it.

The Divine Presence, eternal and unchanging, is the source of both revelation and light. But the exigencies of our present condition cause us to require specialised agencies to help our perception. These are available for us. They are found in ideas and representations which, in their best parts, are traceable to the Divine Presence. The metaphor

may be carried out to the extent of regarding them as artificial lights. The Supreme Presence is thus the light of day, to which, ever and again, one returns. It remains a reserve power, or centre of appeal.

To understand the state of matters that exists, one must notice that in each of us there is a sense, running through the whole being, which is capable of being the instrument of our perceiving God, not indeed in fulness, but in appearances. In order to act, that sense requires first to be aroused, then to be maintained. In relation to that sense, called simply the religious sense, the defining agencies are needed.

By means of the religious sense, helped by defining agencies, we perceive God in three regions: first, in Morality; second, in Nature; and, third, in a region transcending both.

‘Morality,’ in the meaning understood here, is a term deserving careful consideration. It denotes one of the most important facts of the universe, after God Himself. Morality is in truth an immense region, in which the soul may dwell. It is the region which stands ever in an opposition¹ to the life, or system, which is determined by the impulses of finite things. The life determined by finite impulse is ordinarily called Nature. The soul knows a region

¹ Ps. lxii. 9, Rom. viii. 7-8, 1 Cor. ii. 14, Jn. iii. 3.

which is opposed to Nature in this sense of the word. That region is Morality. So, one may say, Morality and Nature stand ever in an opposition to one another; but that statement must be qualified by recognising that there is originally an essential union between the two, which is gradually being restored through Divine Overruling.¹

To describe Morality would be difficult; but to indicate its general character is easy. It is a ribbon-like form, stretching from man to God, showing as between them a commonness of original essence, but, at the same time, an infinite difference of actual state. Or, in a slightly altered aspect, it is a vista between this world and heaven, awing man, and yet charming him to enter on it. It plainly unites man and God; but it as plainly involves a separation between them which looks hopeless. Thus when one perceives Morality with any clearness, one perceives God, but perceives Him infinitely removed.

All who have had Morality brought really before the religious sense, have become aware of two concomitants of it, both so arresting that for many persons they have never again been absent from the mind amidst the varied concerns of life. The one is a Visage, forecasting punishment. The other is a

¹ See below, ch. iii.

Voice bidding us strive, with greater effort than men expend on bodily preservation, to lessen the distance of actual state between ourselves and God—to enter the ribbon-like form, or vista, and travel along it, never to turn back.

But while Morality stands in an opposition to Nature in general, yet God makes appearances to us even within Nature, or, as we may say, out of depths below the surface of Nature.¹ Also, God is to be perceived in a region that transcends both Nature and Morality.

Above the moral path, many and many have seen, covering the whole form of Morality, a celestial Brightness. This brightness, they have testified, has assumed to them at times the appearance of a Face, like the face of a good man, but far more gentle, and as powerful as it is kind. This they have seen; and this, certainly if mysteriously, is indeed God Himself, bridging over the awful separation, promising to carry men and women, of His own power, towards a better state, instead of leaving them to struggle. Thus, a message eternally proceeds towards us from that brightness. Record of the message is contained in our Bible. The message is rightly called *the gospel*.

¹ See below, ch. iii. and xii.; also ch. xi., under “Charles Kingsley.”

Sacred reality, as so understood, may be perceived by all of us through the eternal light. But we have our own special lights also; and these deserve to be regarded with respect according to their degrees of purity.

Foremost among all special lights, yet having a more spontaneous and more abiding nature than the others, is a certain remembrance which we all possess. It is the remembrance of a Life on earth, which has been the central revelation to the world of the Divine Presence.

Of special lights proper the Bible has the right to be regarded as the greatest. The Bible is a record of rare religious experience; and it has become a continual agency for the defining of sacred perception. With the Bible is to be named the guidance of certain influences which are less easily pointed to. This latter guidance is to engage our attention here in a later chapter.

But there has largely prevailed another special light, which has been much confused with the Bible. This is a particular *thought about* the Bible. It can simply be called Literalism.

Literalism is, more particularly, Bible-and-creed-literalism. It is the thought that the divine authority and the warrant for religious faith are

found, in the first place, in the literal statements of the Bible, both in whole and in part, but also, secondly, in the literal statements of certain creeds as interpreting the Bible. Many people think of it and speak of it as if it had been the light by which our fathers were guided. And there is much truth in this; for it has had a marvellous dominion. Yet it was never the only light of any truly religious person. And it was by no means that which led those Prophets, Psalmists, and Apostles whom we peculiarly revere. It has come down to us from Jewish teachers, who flourished in the period just before Christianity. But in the hands of Christians it has been an influence far graver than it was as the Jews used it. It has always been a dim light. Nevertheless, it has been a real defining agency. Like a small lamp, or candle, brought into a dark room, it has disclosed concrete shapes instead of vague blackness.

This guidance is not to be spoken of slightly; but there is reason for speaking of it very seriously.

It is not to be slighted, because in relation to a time in history it was almost certainly an immense power for good. But in our own time one is compelled to notice that it was a very deficient

source of illumination, and that most hurtful errors have been the result of not recognising this.

The good that it did was this, that through many ages there was maintained, under it as the prevailing guidance, a firm apprehension of Morality. This fact has given to it an unalienable dignity. For to have perceived, in all seriousness, the moral relation between oneself and the Most High, is almost to become a new man or woman.

But with every respect towards a light which partly guided our fathers, and has in some measure formed our own early views, we have to recognise now that this light was both deficient and also became the occasion of error.

Literalism was principally deficient in regard to that transcendent brightness which has been alluded to above, as covering over the path of Morality, and, accordingly, in regard to the message which we prize by the name of the gospel. The champions of this defining agency claimed to present the gospel; but when they went on to speak with any detail, it ever proved that their lamp had hardly made this message clear to them. They laid down a new 'law,' rather than proclaimed a gospel. All that they could describe plainly was just Morality—was just the distance of God away, with the coming

punishment, and the call to expend every effort in striving to have the distance made less.

Further, this agency gave an inadequate view even of Morality; it only very partially presented God and man in their real relationship of distance. God was so dimly discerned at the end of the long separating bond, that He remained virtually little more than an Unknown. In consequence, the coming punishment was not trusted to One who would assign to it just limits. And the active life set before each was thought of rarely as a striving to approach a beautiful, winning character, and ordinarily just as a flight from Nature as such.

Then as for Nature, this region received from Literalism almost no illumination at all. And this offended many Nature-lovers, who had noticed some of those appearances above mentioned, which God vouchsafes to make within the region of Nature. Nay, more, a contrariness of testimony often arose within the same person, to the confusing of the view of life. Driven by the prevailing guidance to forsake Nature entirely, one became aware, at the same time, of certain natural claims which one was unable to condemn; and from this there was at least danger of divided allegiance and inconsistent actions.

But with such deficiencies there must also be

noticed some positive errors which were occasioned by an almost exclusive use of this old light.

First, people invested this thought regarding Bible and creed with a character that was far beyond that of a defining agency. Though in fact it was but a help to their own perception, it was not so understood. Worshippers, indeed, neglected the fact that they had a sense by which to perceive the Eternal, and took the statements which were afforded them through transcription, translation, and interpretation, as authorities supplied in place of any perception of their own.¹ This was wrong. We have a religious sense; we have the privilege of discriminating in our knowledge; and now we are surrounded by varied testimony to the unfitness of the scriptural statements for the use to which they were applied.²

The error just mentioned may be generally expressed by saying that Literalism was set up as the exact measure of sacred perception, whereas it has not the right to such a function.

In consequence of this radical error in theory, there have been deduced from the treatment of

¹ See Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, xi. 3.

² The Revised Version is itself a sufficient example of such testimony.

Bible and creed many notions, of dreadful, of paralysing import, which are pronounced to be wrong by all experience, secular and sacred.

Shadows, as we are taught by the exponents of natural science, are caused by obstacles too solid for the waves of light to penetrate. Accordingly, the common metaphor holds good for the point at which we have arrived. The notions just mentioned are shadows originally, the obstacles which cause them being certain hard facts of life which Literalism does not illuminate; and the process of thought that makes Literalism the measure of religious perception gives an importance to these shadows, in which they are mistaken for real things.

Those shadows have mostly to do with the life in the hereafter, which the true gospel message makes known as a blessed life. They show partings for ever of souls near and dear, utter repulsion of persons who have not on earth become Christians, merciless treatment of inquirers who have reached inaccurate conclusions, and another horror which pen cannot describe.

Those notions, paralysing as they are to the most precious hopes of humanity, are opposed by a many-sided experience of overwhelming weight. God is not merciless when He judges. He does not limit

His care to professing Christians. There is not a place of agony into which no sympathetic friend, into which no soothing hand can ever enter. Not the voice of God, but only the imagination of groping man, stifles the hopes of the mother for the lost son, and of the loving child for the lost parent. God is good, far kinder, not less kind, than our feeble fancies can picture Him.

Perhaps the most powerful book which has been written, in modern times, by the sole light of Literalism is the *Pilgrim's Progress* of John Bunyan. And it is representative of the deficiencies, while making the most of the excellences, of that guidance as it has prevailed. This book is marvellous in its description of the moral path. It tells of the experiences incident to Morality, with a vividness that commands and with an accuracy which many have confirmed. Yet how unfair it is to the goodness that appears in ordinary human nature! And how crushingly meagre in the range of its gospel! Reader, have you from your real heart assented to the fate which this book sets forth for every-day people like "Worldly Wiseman," "Vain-confidence," and the poor lad "Ignorance"? Is it not, rather, true that when in the company of the common inhabitants of earth you have heard a sacred voice

bidding you notice how each one was, in some way, a better man or woman than yourself, and that, in moments of quiet, you have been lifted up into the assurance that even for those who have lost the way entirely—those familiar figures, often cleverer than yourself, sometimes better than yourself though so far gone astray—a place will be found, of hope and usefulness, by that Presence whose name is Loving-kindness?

The lamp of Literalism is now becoming unsteady, through a process which none of us can either much arrest or much hasten. But there remain special agencies which take its place. Meanwhile, as we contemplate its deficiencies and the fact beyond our control, that it is being superseded, we can surely, at a time when we are bidden, turn for assurance and for correction to the Divine Presence, the Eternal Light. And it is given us to do this in company with those who have gone before us. If we are forced to abandon some particular points in that 'letter' that ruled so widely, we have still in common with the men of bygone days a creed hardly capable of improvement, in these words gathered from the ages of clear revelation: "God is a Spirit, in and of Himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal,

unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." ¹

¹ "The Larger Catechism of the Church of Scotland," Quest. 7.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEED OF A GOSPEL.

To those who reflect inquiringly on human life there will appear no fact more characteristic of it than a certain prevailing condition of necessity. A condition of necessity adheres to human life, infinitely various in form and fathomless in amount. It is so vast and so varied that it can be met by nothing in Nature, or the generally known system of finite things; and it may fitly be called the need of a 'gospel,' or of an assurance of care for the individual, proceeding from a power that reigns beyond that system.

The phenomenon of human necessity finds complete explanation only in the truth that there is an original commonness of nature between the soul and God, and that at present each one is in some measure fallen away from the original and proper self.

Thus to become conscious of human need and to apprehend the region which has been called here, in

the first chapter, Morality, are practically one and the same act. Those whose attention is concentrated on Nature, or the generally known system of finite things, are therein not impressed with the fact of human necessity—not even if they attain to a vision of God working in Nature. To realise human necessity as a fact, there must be observed the other side of reality, the moral relation between man and God.

The ‘old light’ of Europe played an important part in maintaining the consciousness of human need; but that part, though important, was only one of contribution along with many other influences. Bible-and-creed Literalism was indeed a power disclosing the moral bond; but it is not the only means whereby the moral bond may be apprehended.

There is also to be noticed that Literalism, in virtue of its deficiencies, both represented the need inadequately and also came to misrepresent it. In its view of Morality, with man only distinct and God indistinct, the aspect of the need was far too contracted. And its shadows, which were taken for realities, made it give to the need actually fictitious accompaniments.

First, under Literalism the need was inadequately perceived. What may be called, indeed, the practical side of it was clearly seen. The need appeared to

arise from the tendency of man to do evil, or with his will to resist the Supreme will. This tendency was named 'sin,' and the need was specified as being that each one might become forgiven, then justified, and then sanctified in the sight of God. Now in a way this is indeed all by which man has to be troubled. It is the practical side of need. It is all for which an awakened soul must itself search out provision. But it is not nearly all that drives us to seek help from beyond. Experience of the Most High in relation to man shows necessity to be far more extended and more complex. To begin with, any soul that may believe itself to have secured forgiveness, justification, and the hope of sanctification, has to face the fact that multitudes of others have neither made sure of these things nor sought them. This, to a religious experience, occasions the rise of sympathy, which brings a host of new needs. But they in whom sympathy has asserted itself become gradually aware of all need having another side than the practical. They learn that He who is the Source of sympathy not only blames human beings, but pities them. Thus, besides the disturbing fact of sin, there comes to view the disturbing fact of suffering. For all suffering a gospel becomes sought, and at times even sin itself may appear as classed with

suffering, and be viewed as an inward species of subjection. This aspect of sin, indeed, is only healthful to notice, for ordinary occasions, in the case of others, not in one's own case. But on extraordinary occasions, it is surely permitted by a gracious Creator that one observe it also in relation to oneself. All this, then, proves that Literalism only partially disclosed the need which is inherent in man. It did not too much emphasise the want that arises from a tendency to do wrong; but it neglected suffering as a distinct want, and it neglected that aspect of the evil tendency in which even it appears as a spiritual infirmity.

Many an advancing religious experience has testified to the inadequacy of the aspect in which Literalism presented the deep needs of the human soul. As the religious person has begun to be interested in the fate of others, a new feeling besides censure has beaten against the walls of the heart, and has prompted the question, Is the attitude of God only severe? And many have come thus first to surmise, and later perhaps to see clearly, that the creeds which were literally followed had not exhausted the subject of the relation of the soul to God.¹

¹ A notable witness to such a process is the recent little book, *A Plea for God*, by "Zeno."

The sketch of the soul's destiny which Literalism has for ages popularised, has been like many a really valuable novel, portraying one's life in this world. The story is vivid, consistent, and at first sight convincing. But when one begins to take it very seriously, one discovers that, after all, it leaves the hero just at the turning-point of his career, and that there is still before him a path to traverse, in which he will assuredly have to face many a perplexity.

Second, the shadows which were taken by the venerator of Literalism to be real things, brought into estimation supposed accompaniments of the need which were fictitious. Of these the principal was the necessity of escape from the unspeakable place of torment. To very many who were guided by the old light, escape from that place became the sum and substance of the need. How could it be otherwise? What use for preachers to insist that what they wanted to save from was sin itself, not the consequences of sin? Consequences! If such consequences exist at all in the universe, these souls of ours, if they be not half-befogged, can but be paralysed, and think no longer calmly of anything else. The whole range of experience which the all-wise Ruler of the universe brings before us assures us that the hopeless place does not exist.

Our God is our refuge from the fear of it. But they who thought and taught that it did exist created for imagination a fictitious need.

The Bible itself must not be confused with Literalism on the matter of making conscious the need of a gospel. The Bible has a life of its own quite distinct from its being accepted in its sentences and phrases as the Divine authority. In this distinct life, the Bible is an expression of human experience, stretching down many generations. And as such, the Bible has been one of the most potent of the many influences beyond Literalism, which have helped to stimulate the consciousness of the need. The Bible contains the utterances of not less than fifty, and probably quite a hundred persons, reflecting the experience of millions of others, living through a period of not less than fifteen hundred years. And these utterances all bear witness to a need in the human spirit, diverse, profound, organic, universal.

It would be to go beyond the aim of this work to enter on the different influences which have brought an apprehension of Morality, sufficient to involve the consciousness of the need now under notice. The whole race may be said to have been so far roused to recognise the need, one individual pointing to another its various forms, and all thus becoming

the more acquainted with the elements of their common life.

Looking at the forms in which the need of a gospel appears, we may begin with those the most external. First there is the suffering of pain, weariness, disappointment, injustice. From the endurance of these things we cry out seeking help. The knowledge of God in relation to man brings the intuition of an ideal human life, in which we might not so suffer as we do.

To be mentioned along with ordinary suffering is the earthly climax of it all, death. From the mere loss of life we cry out, as we apprehend the Supreme Being who, though so distant from us in personality, has deigned to bestow upon us atoms of His spiritual essence.

Deeper within us are the experiences of fallibility in understanding. We become oppressed both with the remembrance of the mistakes which we have made, and with the recognition of our liability to make more in the future. In women the admission of such weakness comes earlier, as a rule, than it does in men. Nature asserts itself in men against Morality. Man meets failure with new contrivances, and will not confess himself vanquished. But in time there grows in every man also the confession that he

is extremely fallible, and that, while his best successes might have been far better, his blunders and his continual stupidity are more marked than his power. And in such experience also there whispers a yearning towards what is beyond Nature.

Deeper still is the tendency to do evil with more or less knowledge that it is evil, or with more or less consent of the will. In the case of this also oppression ensues partly on regret at the past and partly on fear of lapses in the future. There have been no human beings who have claimed, or for whom others have claimed, an exemption from this tendency, except One. That it is right to regard One as having been pure, and free of the stains which others deplore, rests on a convincing general testimony which has come down the ages. But for his case an explanation has been wisely found in a special entry of the Divine Spirit into his being. All ordinary persons are regarded by sober judgment as possessing the tendency. Not that they necessarily have it all in the same proportion. Some are in time saved almost completely from intentional evil-doing. This, however, is not to deny the existence in them of the tendency, but to anticipate the fact that many have heard a gospel and have found salvation. The recognition of the tendency, therefore, is of grave

importance; and it is not to underestimate the importance, to find still further facts that call out in the hope of a gospel.

When the case of one's own tendency to do evil is met, there still remains, for sympathetic souls, the need of a cure for the evils, in all forms, which exist in the lives of others. And this last need cannot be provided for by merely preaching to others. Many do not listen to the preaching which is addressed to them. They do not subject themselves to the saving process which may be described to them. There can be little reasonable doubt that many in our midst die without having repented, and without having become rid of the inclination to do wrong. But when they are thus found in a lost condition, *a soul that has long learned from the Supreme Spirit will care for their welfare still.* And so a gospel becomes sought, for the mother bewailing her strong boy, who has died with no religious awakening; for the friend whose gay and admired companion has died caring only for the world; for the wife or sister of some broken man, who has started with promise so brilliant, but has succumbed to evil ways; and for millions of others of like experience, who in certain representations of the gospel have found little to comfort them.

Also there are experiences which may be called extraordinary sufferings. These are sufferings of ills so intertwined, that not even imagination, let alone the resources of this world, can point to a remedy. They may have to do directly with oneself, or with some one else for whom one cares. In the case of such, the spirit is so crushed that it cannot even describe its own need. It cries to God, beseeching Him to show the cure as well as to bestow it.

It will be apparent that according to the form in which the necessity asserts itself will be the kind of gospel-message which is capable of satisfying it. And it will also be apparent that, when one finds a restricted message to be no longer consoling, through a greater need having arisen, there has taken place a growth of the spirit within one. Especially, the emergence, in the soul, of a far-reaching sympathy unfits it for being contented with a limited message. It may be that the spiritual growth has not been attained without serious humiliation and even contrition. In many cases, without doubt, this is so. In self-dissatisfaction and self-condemnation there may be born sympathy as well as personal religion, charity as well as faith. And accordingly, it is a grievous mistake to suppose that those who turn to listen to the larger messages profess one whit less of personal

lowliness than those who will hear only the more restricted. But still, the experience of the broader necessity is an advance in spiritual condition. Dissatisfaction with certain formations which the gospel has assumed, is caused by the fuller consciousness of the extent to which a gospel is needed.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRUE GOSPEL.

THE true gospel for mankind is the gospel that can meet the needs of mankind. If there were no such gospel, the whole idea of a gospel would have to be regarded as a delusion; and after ridding oneself of the delusion with pain, there would be nothing left but to settle down to emptiness and despair. A message that only met a few of the human needs might, indeed, be accepted in such a case as more than men deserve. But it would not be the gospel at which the heart grasps. And its deficiencies would be overwhelming were it found to limit itself to a few human beings as well as to a few general needs. There is, however, a true gospel. There is a gospel for the needs of mankind.

From the state of finding unsatisfied the needs which were described in last chapter man earnestly seeks deliverance. He falls on his knees, and, with faltering lips, beseeches his Creator for help in the

presence of death, disease, sin, parting, and every horror. And his cry is more than answered. A message comes, promising not merely what he has asked, but more than he has asked.

The message does not come from Nature—taking the word ‘Nature’ to mean the generally known system of finite things. The natural system meets many a want, for which, time after time, we have recourse to it; but it breaks down before the experiences of conscious evil impulses, of approaching death, and of the long parting from friends.

Nor does the message come from Morality—taking the word ‘Morality’ to mean the region which the mind comes to apprehend as outside of Nature and in contrast to it, or the relation, involving distance, which exists between the soul and God. Of course the words ‘moral’ and ‘morality’ may be used in a sense according to which they might be made to indicate the true source of the gospel-message. In a correct enough sense of the words, the source of good tidings is in a ‘moral’ government, and the realisation of the promise is living a ‘moral’ life. But this is using the words in such a way as to anticipate the reconciliation between Nature and that which is here called Morality. There is a distinguishable region constituted by the relation

implying immeasurable distance, which exists between ourselves and God. It is the apprehension of this region which first rouses us to turn a critical eye on Nature, and perceive our many needs. But this opposite region, while occasioning our knowledge of the needs, does not fully supply them. It puts us on the way of having them supplied. It turns the gaze towards God. And some have thought that there is no other satisfaction to be found than in becoming devoted to Morality. Such seek salvation in merely flying from Nature, abjuring, on their own part, all further care for their personal wants. But apart from the objection that there is thus promised no complete satisfaction, Morality becomes itself the centre of new needs. And what occasions the knowledge of these new needs is the abandoned Nature itself. Nature and Morality are regions of heterogeneous character, continually breaking out into war with one another. And as acquaintance with Morality leads us to find wants in Nature, so acquaintance with Nature, in its turn, leads us to the discovery of new wants in Morality. Morality, indeed, always resounds with a voice sacred and infallible, which assures each person that only in its own path can peace be found. Nevertheless, it presents at places such labyrinths of difficulty, that

the travelling soul becomes surrounded with gloom. And to this experience there may be added the disappointing discovery that certain fellow-travellers, seemingly quite sincere, have lost their way, and are, so to speak, plunging into the pits of ungenerous, unlovely action. Then it comes that, on looking back, the deserted Nature suddenly shows phenomena in which one cannot but discern the Divine Spirit, so that for the moment the dwellers within it seem to be nearer God than the earnest pilgrims who are pursuing the path of Morality. This will not shake the devotion to the moral path in the case of those who find their satisfaction in what is higher than Morality; but it is enough to show that one must seek higher than Morality in order to be satisfied completely. These arresting natural phenomena arise before one in such things as the majesty of mountain and torrent and the glories of a summer landscape; also in the mysterious powers of music, painting, and the other arts; and also in the merry life of children, and in certain aspects of the natural affections; in a word, in all that gives rise to the spirit of *poetry*.¹ Morality, indeed, disqualifies Nature

¹ "She would ask herself when she went to say her prayers of a night, whether it was not wicked to feel so much delight as that with which 'Vedrai Carino' and 'Batti Batti' filled her gentle little bosom? But the Major, whom she consulted upon this head,

as a repose for the soul. It proves Nature to be often cold and comfortless, in spite of its loud halloos of exuberant life. But Nature, in its turn, sets bounds to the claims of Morality. A voice speaks in Nature, through its finite objects, yet out of depths which are not finite, assuring us that, if God is not in Nature alone, neither is He in Morality alone, and that when both regions are studied the gospel is still to seek.

The true gospel-message comes from One above Nature and Morality. It comes from One who both transcends those mundane existences and also inwraps them within His own being. This One is God. God can deliver us from the corruptions which cause our needs. That is to say, in other words, God can deliver us from the law of consequences, or law of effects among finite forces. And from this He promises to deliver us.

God promises to deliver us, not by undoing the natural system, but by *overruling* it. The Divine overruling is the realisation of the gospel-message.

For the idea of Divine Overruling, theologians for as her theological adviser (and who himself had a pious and reverent soul), said that for his part, every beauty of art or nature made him thankful as well as happy," etc.—THACKERAY, *Vanity Fair*.

centuries substituted the idea of Interference. This may have been suitable to a stage of mental development; but it was inaccurate. The notion of an interference with Nature, for the sake of man, has become more and more repellent to the thoughtful. It has been observed to be both confusing and unsatisfying as bringing consolation. And the defection from it has caused widely a dislike of the idea of 'miracle,' with which it has commonly been identified. One is apt to go too far in this. The term 'miracle' has still the function of indicating a sound idea, namely, an occurrence which, to an unusual degree, stimulates the personal soul to apprehend the Supreme Overruler. None the less, the departure of the human mind from thoughts of interference to thoughts of overruling, is right, and is of vast importance.

They who centre their hopes on any other force than God Himself are in error as to the gospel. But God has made known His own gospel.

God makes known the gospel by revealing Himself to a sense which runs through our being. To know God and to know the gospel are the same. Also, to know God and to know the perfection or unfailing goodness of God are the same. We cannot com-

prehend the goodness of God, but we can apprehend it.

God as known to the religious sense is, to begin with, the Sovereign over all. No force that we know distinct from Him places limits on His action. Thus those theologians cannot be right who would limit His power by the 'free-will' of man. Nor can those be right who would limit it by one attribute, called 'justice,' unless they can show that attribute to be compatible with His complete being, or His perfection. We have only one limit to be sure of, and that is Himself—His perfection, His unchanging goodness. Thus the gospel has been well defined as "the glad message of the government of the world and of every individual soul by the almighty and holy God, the Father and Judge." ¹

But next to the fact that God is Sovereign comes, in the gospel-message, the fact that God is Heavenly Father. This fact has found formal expression in the doctrine of the Trinity, and devotional recognition in the adoration of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity has set forth that, while God is the Beginning of all things, another 'persona' has been eternally begotten as the End of all things, that the Second is "of the same substance" as the

¹ Harnack's *History of Dogma*, Buchanan's Transl., i. 58.

First, and that there is a Third, also of the same substance, that ever works, making the others known. The doctrine of the Trinity is essentially true. But it is wrongly apprehended when any separation is made between the attributes of the different 'personas.' It is one God that remains, yet goes forth eternally. God is full of care. He is seeking us out continually. He overrules our vanities and our falls. It is thus that the moralistic view of the Supreme Being, though true, presents only one side of the truth. So, indeed, does the naturalistic view; but when God is apprehended as transcending both Nature and Morality, it is found that He is not only above the world, but in the world. Infinitely above us, He yet has come down to dwell among us. Abiding remote in condition, He is at the same time with us both in being and in care. The idea of His care sums up the thought which the doctrine of the Trinity formally defines. He cares for the humblest and most erring. He is so good that we cannot think how merciful He is. We know this by direct perception of Him as He reveals Himself to us. And specially, so is God in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The truth is expressed with the forcibleness of simplicity in these lines from an admirable modern hymn:—

"It is God : His love looks mighty. But 'tis mightier than it seems.

'Tis our Father, and His fondness goes out far beyond our dreams.

For the love of God is broader than the measures of man's mind.

And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."¹

Stated in detail, the gospel-message may be called, succinctly, the message of something better than we can think or imagine. God is better than Nature and better than Morality. His gospel is better than the finite system, and better than the moral path, in our purest imagination of either. They in whom the sense of God is awakened know the gospel. They cannot completely express the message which they learn. They can only say, it is better than our thoughts. But God, granting many revelations or partial appearances of His eternal being, has put into general possession a number of ideas which help us to express the gospel in greater fulness. And there is one among those ideas which assures us that, though He will further expand His message to us as we grow more fitted to receive it, He will not

¹ By F. W. Faber. It is a coincidence that this hymn is similarly made use of in the recent striking work *A Religion that will Wear*, by "A Scottish Presbyterian." I have not thought it necessary to alter the passage in which I quote from it here.

reveal anything that will confound us. This idea is *faithfulness*. Besides faithfulness there are in God and in His gospel ineffable purity of goodness, universal love, love fixed on each one, untiring care for each, kindness, gracious condescension—all of these everlasting, and far better than we can imagine them.

In reading the true gospel, one necessarily assumes the attitude of *prayer*. The mind and heart are turned towards Him who is above our finite world. Thus a natural bodily accompaniment of apprehending the gospel is looking *up*. The impulse to look up at times is inherent in the human being. It is one bodily accompaniment of the soul's religious perception. It is a way of fixing the religious sense on its proper object, namely, the life that transcends our finite system. Another similar accompaniment is shutting the eyes, and another still is retiring to comparative absence from the world. This last has received sanction from the most sacred voice that has spoken to us through human lips. As in his own life our Lord Jesus frequently retired to the wilderness or to a mountain-top, to commune with the Divine Presence, so he said to his disciples, When thou prayest, enter into thy private chamber, and, having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in

the hidden place, and thy Father, who sees in the hidden place, will give in return to thee.

When God has been separately perceived, both Morality and Nature become renewed in aspect. Morality, while still showing the immeasurable distance between God and human beings as persons, becomes also permeated by the Heavenly Presence. And the soul, quickened into moral desire, no longer struggles joylessly along its endless path, but is irresistibly borne on, glowing with thankfulness. This experience, indeed, is likely from time to time to be clouded. Few attain to so continued a vision of the Supreme that they are free of pain or even of doubt in their efforts. But the experience will be more and more confirmed as they assume the attitude of prayer and listen afresh to the gospel. Correspondingly, Nature, while still causing perplexity and danger to the human spirit, is seen more distinctly to be the ever-possible channel of Divine revelation. One no longer hesitates to find lessons for religion even in a field of lowly daisies, or to recognise some kindness of common life to be inspired by the Supreme, and inspired for our sake out of His adorable goodness.

But God, transcending and enveloping Nature and Morality, also, for His worshippers, reconciles

them. His goodness infuses into His worshippers a power in virtue of which they may, after a time, traverse the moral path and yet carry Nature with them. A lesson forced on every earnest person, sooner or later, is that a moral life is the richer when not one individual only is approaching God, but an individual with companions and with the endowments which are presented by the budding universe around. When God has been separately perceived, however, one learns that Nature is originally ordered as the fit source of companionship and equipment, and that to the soul there is promised a power in which to avail itself of the riches of Nature. The attainment, in this way, of a reconciliation between Nature and Morality can hardly be expected early in a religious experience. In the way of discipline, there may be required for a time much turning of the back upon Nature. But the state of reconciliation is promised by the gospel; and the means towards arrival at it is frequent prayer.

It is in accordance with this that we have already in ordinary use a second meaning of the words 'nature' and 'natural' as applied to practice. We commonly disclaim the association of 'nature' with the wild and wayward actions of finite creatures

as such, and use the word to designate a course of action which is at once the only healthful and also the highest and best. In so doing, we express a real truth; but 'nature' in this sense is Nature as ultimately ordered or as carried along the moral path.

God bids those who perceive Him remember His everlasting love even in relation to the death which comes on all. He bids them recall how, in that earthly climax, they will still be His children, the objects of His unwearying kindness. To those who perceive the presence of God with them, death becomes a sleep from which there is promised a joyful awakening. The fact of death has many aspects. One important aspect is that in which it is a reminder of our vain condition and a deterrent from all presumptuous folly. But another is surely this, that in it we learn how, in a condescending love which causes in return the deepest human devotion, our Creator has ordained at least one experience in which only He who gave us our life sees ways and means to help us; and no other power, but only He, is our Trust.

The Christian scheme has bodied forth the gospel. We can reverently observe the agency of the Supreme in the unfolding of its essentials. Under that agency,

it has grown within the life of the world. It has not, in its prevailing forms, escaped an admixture of error; but its essentials are sound and true. In its growth, there is first to be noticed an infusion of two signal views of the Divine Being, which were entertained in history. The one of these was principally a moralistic view, the other principally a naturalistic. The one was that of the Hebrews, the other that of the Greeks. Hebrew thought, speaking generally, regarded God as in the distance—though it became, even in itself,¹ half-conscious that the distance was bridged over. Greek thought, on the other hand, found God so near that it hardly distinguished His life from the powers and forms of Nature—though its greatest thinkers awoke to a half-consciousness of transcendence. But in the union of Hebrew thought with Greek thought which was occasioned by the destruction of the Israelite kingdoms, there took place an immense development of perception and understanding. The Jewish students of Alexandria, guided by the teaching that was handed down from Plato, reached a standpoint at which they retained, with their own ancestors, the apprehension of the

¹ For the giving weight to this modification, which is important for a right estimate of the different national religions in themselves, I am much indebted to Holtzmann (*Neutest. Theol.*, i. p. 57).

Divine remoteness, yet distinguished an emanation of the Deity, afterwards to be called a 'persona' in the Deity, that had come down to permeate the actual universe. Here were the germs of the doctrine of the Trinity, and of the more complete knowledge of the gospel. But another force gave the clearness and firmness, as well as the general acceptation, to this movement of thought. What the Alexandrian Jews dimly discerned became the cherished treasure of a vast experience, through a personality whom God gave to the world. This was One who to beholders was pure and winning in character, while in himself he was conscious of union with the Eternal; who in time was freely received as the Centre of religion, and called the second 'persona' of the Godhead 'incarnate.'

CHAPTER IV.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND OF THE GOSPEL.

GOD is ever manifesting Himself; but we come to know Him gradually, according to our own development.

In order to know God and be sure of the gospel, it is necessary that the religious sense be active. The religious sense is first awakened by means of 'revelations,' or special appearances of God; and afterwards it is ordinarily kept alive by defining agencies, called here, as commonly, 'lights.'

The Divine Presence is originally the one defining agency. And it is in recognition of this fact that the Gospel of John speaks of the light "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." It applies this description to God as the 'Logos'—so called by the Alexandrian philosophy which the evangelist sets forth—or to that Presence that emanates from the Creator and pervades the world. But God deigns eternally so to act that special appear-

ances of His being take place in time both for individuals and for communities. These are the revelations. And usually, after the revelations have been experienced, there are formed memories, fancies, ideas, and other embodiments, by which they are in some way preserved. These are the lights, or the ordinary defining agencies which prevail in the world. It may be reverently believed that the revelations take place in accordance with the course of man's own development. But one never knows when and where they may occur.

Some daring students of sacred things—many of them both cultured and devout—acknowledge only the one help to perception, namely, the Divine Presence itself.¹ But we require the ordinary agencies, and we are all unconsciously indebted to them. There are many kinds of human labour in which one is hardly able to bear the bright sunlight. And a similar state of matters is found in the case of the higher vision. Or, changing the figure entirely, the adoption of no help to knowledge but

¹ While all who agree with these pages will regard any non-Christian Theism not only with distaste, but with disapproval, as being intellectually mistaken or inadequate, yet one must not neglect the lesson that is conveyed by the appearance of any person who, disclaiming all specialisation, shows a clear and fervent intuition of the Divine Being.

the Supreme Presence itself is like living in the open air. As ordinary human beings find their weakness at times beneficently ministered to by a sheltered interior, so it is with our spirits viewed as rational agents. And the Most High has treated us according to our weakness in providing, from time to time, particular aids for our rational life in its movements of sacred search. There is only to be remembered, on the other hand, the truth, to which allusion was made here in the first chapter, that the Divine Presence is like the light of day, to which one may ever turn in the way of appeal. It is healthful to go frequently from our indoor labour, so to speak, to the light of day and to the free air.

A *revelation* is, properly, a first specialising of the Divine Presence to the religious vision of a man or woman, or of a circle of men and women. The word 'revelation' has almost exact equivalents in the other languages which specially concern us in sacred study. The Hebrew is *Galah*, the Greek is *Apokalypsis*, the Latin *Revelatio*, and the German *Offenbarung*.

The idea of revelation is kept sound when one adheres to the etymological factors which go to make up the term. According to the derivation of the term 'revelation,' the idea amounts to this, *An unveiling, or opening up, of what remains there.*

The remaining there of the existence unveiled is presupposed in any idea of unveiling. One presupposes that the existence from which the veil is withdrawn is there both before and after the removal. And the being of God is such that, in the sacred case, we are justified in developing the thought of *remaining there* into the thought of *remaining always there*. Thus a revelation has itself three factors, which may be discriminated, namely :—

1. A presupposed eternal existence (God).
2. A historical event (the opening to view).
3. A sense in us, capable of perceiving God so far, as He becomes so far unveiled.

Further, the second of these three factors has two aspects, an aspect in relation to God and an aspect in relation to man. In the first of these it is lifted up from being a purely historical event, and regarded as an outcome in time from the eternal Divine action; in the second, it remains an event in time and place.

The idea, in this fulness of content, may be said to have been present to the mind of the Apostle Paul. Not that we are permitted to impute to him any actual discrimination of the different factors. But all the factors seem to have influenced his thought.

Both before and after the time of Paul, however,

and indeed on to the present day, there is to be noticed as current a very loose and inaccurate grasp of the idea of revelation. In this loose grasp the first factor, the existence of God, comes to be carelessly viewed. More particularly, the eternity and the unchangeableness of God come to be lost sight of; the notions of time and space intrude themselves into the thought of God and of His actions. People speak of 'revelation.' But this does not mean an unveiling of what is always there. It means just the same thing as the word 'communication,' and is applied to any kind of sacred knowledge. The communication may refer to what is past only, or to what is future only; it does not necessarily refer to the eternal and unchangeable.

But a further degeneration is to be observed in that current grasp of the idea. Partly, perhaps, from emphasising the moral side of truth, but more from imagining God after the likeness of finite beings, people have largely pictured God as necessarily at a distance from themselves; and thus they have come to think of Himself and of His actions as in the past and in the future rather than in the present. Thus the idea of revelation becomes completely transformed. It is not even indifferently a communication of either past, present, or future fact; it is decisively

a communication of what is not present, and therefore not eternal. This condition of the idea is still very prevalent in some quarters. According to it, people never think of applying the word 'revelation' to what changes not, but use it in relation to expected events, such as the "Second Coming of Christ" and the end of the world.

The Idealistic theologians of modern times have restored the lost factor in the idea of revelation. These Idealistic theologians are men who have learned to give full weight to the eternity, the unchangeableness, and the omnipresence of God. They are properly called Idealistic, as seeing the ideal always and everywhere in the real. Such cannot allow the notions of time and space to intrude into the idea of God. They know that whatever God is, He is eternally and unchangeably. And they therefore conceive of a revelation as that which makes known to the individual soul not past or future events, but the eternal being of the Most High, who is above all, and yet around all, and even in all.

In appreciating this restoring work, one must beware of a tendency to forget the *second* factor, the historical event. Such a tendency may easily arise while following closely the German theologians, who have been the leaders in the restoration of the first

factor. The German Idealistic study may be said to view revelation more on the side of God than on the side of the world, and accordingly, even in the case of the revelation in Jesus Christ, to emphasise the essential thoughts conveyed, rather than the historical detail.¹ While this is permissible and right, one must beware, in following it, of a generalising tendency, that may lead to a disregarding of the historical event. If this come about, then the idea of revelation is again impaired. While in the other extreme there is no difference between 'revelation' and 'communication,' in this there is little difference between 'revelation' and 'manifestation.' The idea comes to be the same as the other thought, that the Eternal manifests Himself continually; and one fails to estimate rightly the life of Jesus and other revealing events as parts of human history. The tendency, at first the result of corrective effort, becomes a lapse into mistake on the other side. It is quite true that God is above time and place; but it is to be remembered that we and the world are not so. As we and the world go on growing, we come into such relations to the Eternal Spirit that we can truly speak of Him as revealing Himself to us specially,

¹ Notable is Biedermann (*Christliche Dogmatik*). Also Schweitzer, and, later, Pfeiderer.

personally, graciously. His act is eternal; but so far as we are concerned, it is realised in time and place.

We must try to keep both factors intact. We shall think soundly on the matter if we hold that God is ever with us, and that we may at any time perceive Him, when He may will.

When revealed, God is known as a *distinct* object from either Nature or Morality, or any part of one or other of them. If it were not so, He could not be known as transcending these. We may conveniently use the word 'direct' to signify the quality of our knowledge of God whereby we know Him as distinct from all else. We know God directly by means of the sense which runs through our being.

But, at the same time, God is not known *apart* from either Nature or Morality. Were He known apart, He would be a third order of finite or limited existences. And this is contradictory of the idea of God. While our involuntary and right action in appealing to God is to turn from Nature, we ought to remember that, though above Nature, He also, being infinite, includes it and is apprehended through it. We may conveniently use the word 'immediate' to signify that quality which belongs to knowledge of the things of Nature, but not to knowledge of God. We know God directly—knowing Him as quite distinct

from Nature; but we do not know Him immediately—we know Him through Nature, though we apprehend Him as above it.

One more point, however, is carefully to be secured. We have seen that God, who is mediately known, may be specially known to one individual or to a circle of individuals. The point to be added is this, that He is *everlastingly free as to the medium which He may choose*. He has been specially perceived in a ‘burning bush,’ in a ‘still small voice,’ in a whirlwind, and on a mountain-top. He may, in some small measure, be specially perceived in a generous action, in a kind word, and even in an appealing look.

Does it seem as if the recognition of this last point interferes with honour towards any medium whereby God has certainly become known? Surely it interferes with no due honour. You may most loyally cherish the medium, and yet remember how incomprehensible is the Fatherly government of the Most High.

The careless supposition that God has only a few fixed mediums through which He reveals Himself is part and parcel of the mental process which elevates mere defining agencies to seem to be attached to the very being of God, and to be not merely helps for perception, but measures for perception.

The term ‘Protestant’ is worthily applied to the

denoting of a determination to recognise no limitations in the ways in which God may reveal Himself, beyond such as may be created by the Divine perfection itself.¹

And yet there is here no occasion for bitterness between existing Protestants and existing Catholics. For many so-called Protestants have just as unquestionably elevated a mere 'lamp' to be a measure of the ways of God as any Catholics have. They have done this in the case of Bible-literalism. And Literalism has been a crueller limitation than was the Catholic Church Guidance. The Church-guidance had at least something like a human heart about it, but not so the pronouncement that measured the sacred voice by writings, nay, by particular translations and interpretations. One might think of a Mother Church as a gentle nurse to whom one might go with perplexities; but oh, the cold desolation of believing that from words that make an end of hope there is no manner of appeal. Thus it seems reasonable to think that the dreadful shadows which were produced by Literalism in early times were softened by Church-guidance.² A purgatory out of which an approachable priest might deliver a soul in

¹ Compare the quotation from Zwingli, in ch. x.

² This is suggested by Charles Kingsley, "Yeast," ch. viii.

pain was at least something to turn to from the pictures which the exponents of Literalism have drawn. But let us humbly thank our Creator that He is Himself, in His continual presence, the Refuge from those imaginations of fierce men, and that the benign ideas that come from Him chase those fancies away. And without entering on party questions, one may worthily use the name 'Protestant' to denote the position in which any one may recognise that freeness in the Divine manifestation according to which the Divine Presence never fails as a centre of appeal.

God has vouchsafed to reveal Himself in two historical channels, through which we all ordinarily enjoy more benefit than we are apt to remember. First, He has pre-eminently revealed Himself in the experience of an ancient nation, and more particularly in the experiences of certain individuals within that nation. Second, and more signally, He has given to the world one central revelation, which it is ours to appropriate, so as to be none of us without a clear perception of Himself and His gracious gospel.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOSPEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE Old Testament is a collection of books which, in the main, emanated from certain religious men—we can rightly say, inspired men, belonging to the ancient Israelite race. Students who have critically examined it agree very generally that, in its present form, it has been subjected to a process of formal reconstruction, at the hands of men who lived after the time of the original authors. These later contributors to its form are likely to have been the ordinary ministers of the people's established religion—priests and scribes. The whole collection of books, however, is sufficiently diverse to support the conviction that we have still, in the Old Testament, unaltered, a very large accumulation of original utterances, the product of inspired and rare religious perception.

The nation of the Israelites are proved, by the existence of the Old Testament, to have had inborn

a specially acute sense of the Divine Presence. At the same time, it was certain outstanding individuals that both kept the sense awake in the general body of the people, and applied it so as to enrich the knowledge of the whole world. Had it not been for these individuals, humanly speaking, the general body of the Israelites, as can clearly be seen from their books, would, like the general body of modern nations, have allowed the objects of the ordinary five senses to engage their chief attention. The individuals whose sense of God specially led the people and instructed succeeding ages, are rightly called *Prophets*.

The earliest prophet that can be pointed to with certainty is *Moses*. Moses belonged to a time when the people of Israel were a nation without a land, living under the alien rule of Egypt. God revealed Himself to Moses with a clearness and an overpowering urgency, under which Moses became one of the world's religious reformers. He had attained, we learn, to a special revelation, of which the outward occasion was a burning bush. Accordingly he appealed to his nation in the name of 'Jahveh'—in the name of God as his awakened perception made him conceive of God, and as their ancestors had already in some way conceived of Him. He appealed successfully. They listened to him, and

became obedient to him. His hopes of a reformed religion seem to have connected themselves inseparably with a liberation from Egyptian influences and with national independence. He led them, in consequence, away from Egypt to freer, though sterner, surroundings, and as they journeyed he was accepted by them as the exponent of the will of the Eternal, whose ways were little known in the land in which they had lately dwelt.

The details of the settlement of the Israelite tribes into one nation, in the land of Canaan, are absorbingly interesting; and they are now being investigated, discussed, and placed before the general reader, in more or less fulness and certainty, by bands of scholars of varied accomplishments. For this sketch, however, these details are unnecessary. In view of the object now before us, of seeing the early history of the gospel-message, it is enough to notice one unquestionable fact. That fact is that but a few generations after the time of Moses, the people were settled in the land of Canaan, in something of a political alliance, if not in complete national unity, and were distinguished by a special acuteness and trueness of the religious sense.

The perception of God which was exercised by those early Israelites was in notable contrast to that

of their contemporaries, even in regard to definite results. It also stands in contrast to modern perception of the Divine Being, not as to results, but as to strength and activity.

The principal definite result which has been carried forward from it to affect subsequent history was the formation of a particular thought. The particular thought came to be a very important defining agency, or 'light.'

The light by which the early Israelites were themselves guided, to begin with, may be left undetermined. But very soon they became led by a particular thought, or—if 'thought' is hardly a right word to apply to the force which guided a people still warlike and semi-barbarian—a motto. It was this, *The Lord is among us.*¹ It was in essence the thought of a *people of God*.

Those ancient men of the East were like the Christian Church in one thing: What they saw principally by their light was Morality. Though they believed that God was among them to care for them, yet they apprehended Him specially as infinitely raised above them, and as summoning them to obey Him with effort and difficulty. Wild as their actual morals were, they can be distinctly observed to have

¹ Micah, iii. 11.

been struggling into the path which leads from man in the grasp of Nature towards God as arousing aspiration. They chose to strive in the service of One of whom it was even said, "Ye cannot serve the Lord; for He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression nor your sins." ¹

But the gospel was also to an extent discerned by them. They discerned it to a degree corresponding to the needs which rose most clamantly in them.

We cannot sum up all their needs, nor can we tell how much they knew of gospel. Neither the whole of need nor the whole of faith is ever recorded. But we can lay hold of one centre-point. In the beginnings of the national history, the need which most openly asserted itself was, *that they might be freed from oppression* at the hands of the Egyptian government. It is more than metaphor which connects that early experience of theirs with the experience of all mankind, so as to suggest its being typical of what is universally passed through. The experience was an example of that crushing of the personal life by the natural system, which takes place in all ages. Many accept without a murmur the fact that there is such a crushing of man by

¹ Joshua, xxiv. 19.

Nature, and battle with the oppressing power as far as their strength permits. But it was in the genius of this people to summon forth the fact as an object of reflection, and at the same time to see written, as it were, in the air around them a supernatural message, promising that the experience of need would end in triumphant satisfaction.

The prophets saw the message and virtually called on the people to notice it. The people read it in the light of the thought that they were themselves the people of the Lord.

It would be a monstrous underestimate of the facts that would explain away what took place, averring that the intensity of the need made those persons just imagine a satisfaction. A body of evidence so consistent as that with which the Old Testament supports the elevation of both prophets and people to perceive a Life above their own, is itself too solid a fact to be hastily dismissed; and subsequent history has confirmed the possibility of such an act of perception. The religious sense of the prophets, to begin with, and of the people in response to them, was awakened to apprehend the Divine Life, through an unveiling which occurred in time and place, under the will of the Eternal Spirit.

Both prophets and people, according to their stage

of mental development, at first interpreted the gospel message as a promise that the nation would yet possess a "land flowing with milk and honey."

The "land flowing with milk and honey" proved to be one of those representations which are simply illustrated by the resting-place that comes within the range of vision of a mountain-climber, and may be mistaken by him for the summit of the mountain. They attained in time to what seemed to be their goal; but they hardly noticed it when they came to it, and they knew that they were not yet at the place which the sacred message had promised to them. The land was, like every other earthly habitation, of uncertain tenure, from year to year, and after awhile it was taken from them altogether. More serious, their condition proved, even with the land, to be, broadly speaking, as needy as ever. Accordingly, the prophetic inspiration continuing, new needs came to be distinguished, and a new message was read, corresponding to them. The new needs were of two kinds—of the two kinds into which needs universally divide themselves. First, the contemplation of the moral region brought to notice the fact that in the people themselves were evil tendencies which radically separated them from God. And second, an occasional uplifting to behold the gracious countenance of the

Most High, transcending the moral region, brought to notice the fact that one might pity the people as well as blame them. Corresponding to the two kinds of need which were discriminated, the utterances of the later prophets came to be divided into two classes. The one class bitterly reproached the people for being unworthy of the name of a people of God, and warned them that nothing but purer moral lives would bring any possibility of welfare. The other class of utterances were spoken in the depth of sorrow, and contained a promise that, in spite of the dreadful disappointment which they had to face, the good God would still care for them. The individual prophets were, to an extent, similarly divided; but many of them used both kinds of expression, ordinarily following the moral line, and at times rising to that even more ethereal platform. Amos, a man of humble origin—a herdsman—seems to have taken the lead in the moral class of prophesying; and he was followed notably by Jeremiah. Joel seems to have been the earliest pronounced representative of the other; and in later time an important exponent appeared in Habakkuk. The strongest expressions, however, of the hopeful class, are contained in the books of writers who also at times adopted the other way of speaking—Hosea, Micah, Ezekiel, and last,

but in insight first, twin prophets separated by time in their own lives, but united in the devotion of after ages, Isaiah and the profound seer who contributed the second half of the book which bears that prophet's name. In the new promise that came to be read, the thought of a people of God was used only subordinately as a light; for a brighter light shone upon them, which had assuredly been formed through many an individual intuition of the Divine Presence in its own clear glory. This was the thought of a *Redemption for mankind*.

Such a process amounted to a revolution in the Israelite religion. Space cannot here be afforded for inquiring into the many intricate movements which belonged to the change. It will be enough to give a comprehensive glance at the track of truth which the prophets of this period really discovered.

In the discoveries of the great prophets whose books form the latter half of the Old Testament, the state of things still holds good, that the prophecy read corresponded to the need which had specially asserted itself. The crying need was now centred in the national disappointment of the people. With this the prophets taught them to connect the moral corruption which was proved to adhere to them as to all mankind. And beneath that, again, there

appeared to some the general helplessness and pitiableness of human nature as such.

The Second Isaiah addressed the Almighty in prayer as the 'Father' of the people.¹ But this was one of a few achievements in penetration which excelled the others. The idea of 'Father' brought light not only for the future, but for the very origin of human nature. Mostly, the prophets of this period pointed to the future alone, discerning God specially as affording hopes of better days.

So far as the future was concerned, they were able to give definite expression to the truth that God can and will deliver from the law of consequences, or law of effects among finite forces.

Thus, Hosea expressed the message from the Supreme in this way: "And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the land, and will make them to lie down safely and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God."² And a similar utterance, more famous, is that of the Second Isaiah: "Instead of the thorn

¹ lxiii. 16; lxiv. 8.

² ii. 18, 23.

shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”¹

The promise of a Resurrection was set forth by these prophets, in absence of detail, but none the less with fervency. It would be hard to find a more confident record of the promise of renewal which is heard in the midst of earth’s disappointments, than is to be read in the twenty-fourth to the twenty-seventh chapters of the Book of Isaiah.

Of other details, two call for mention. One of these shows how error entered into the vision of even those illustrious seers; the other is of importance as linking their more definite perceptions to those of a later age. First, in their reading of the Divine message they thought that they saw this most distressing limitation, that the bright hopes which were put forward could only be entertained for a ‘remnant’ of the original chosen people. This limitation was assuredly not really in the Divine message, but in a commentary which had intruded into it from earthly experience. Second, the most eminent of those prophets foretold the coming of a Deliverer for the nation—the ‘Messiah,’ or the

¹ lv. 13 (Old Testament quotations here are from Revised Version).

Anointed. The historical Isaiah represented this coming Deliverer as uniquely equipped from the Divine life; the Second Isaiah represented him as subjected to earthly sorrow, but enduring it in complete submissiveness.

Even those eminent prophets did not put the crown on the Old Testament record of revelation. That was the honourable achievement of a number of persons whose names are lost to us, the writers of the Psalms. From King David himself, down through many generations, a number of earnest worshippers expressed in lyric form their individual experiences. They were keenly sensitive to a variety of needs that immensely outstretched the needs of the nation as a whole. They prayed, accordingly, to that Refuge that is ever-present. And they wrote down joyously the results of their prayers. These results were a series of personal upliftings, involving a clear discernment of the unfailing care of the Most High. And their record of them is so simple and so convincing that even we, who read it thousands of years later, may find it sufficient, in the face of all perplexity, to bear witness to the ever-kind Overruler.

Such royal experiences within the Israelite, or Jewish people, were succeeded by a time of comparative blindness. Comparative only; for there was

still individual experience, and there were still even psalms.¹ But the penetration was of a feebler order ; and men became content with the dim lamp of Old Testament Literalism. This time, however, was but a pause before Israel was exalted among the nations, through one arising within it who was justly to be called the ' Light of the World.'

¹ The later eighteen psalms in Greek, called the "Psalms of Solomon," are translated into English by Ryle and James.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CENTRAL REVELATION OF GOD AND OF THE GOSPEL.

A REVELATION viewed on the side of the Most High Himself is the supreme mode of action through which He may help an individual, or a number of individuals, to know His benign message. The message rests ultimately not on a temporal event, but on His own unchanging being. Also, He continually declares the message. He continually manifests His celestial personality, from which it proceeds. All that is conceivable which He may do beyond that, so as to make the real gospel be known, is to reveal Himself to individuals in such a way that their sense may be aroused, and they may perceive the abiding source of promise.

This, we have learned, He does, in His own ways, from time to time. And we have seen that He revealed Himself with singular clearness, generation after generation, to individuals belonging to the

ancient people of Israel. But there is indubitably proved to have been made to the modern world, as an aggregate of individuals, one central revelation. It was made over eighteen hundred years ago, and the medium of it was the life of Jesus Christ. In contemplating the life of Jesus Christ, it is ours to see the Eternal unveiled. We know now, indeed, that God is always caring for us, always saving us, in His adorable goodness. But we have learned of God in contemplating the life of Jesus. In Jesus is unveiled the Overruling Personality; and therein is known a salvation which is eternally, unchangeably a fact.

Like revelations of narrower range, this revelation to the world has been made, and can only have been made, through the religious sense, or sense of God. Whatever our eyes or our ears may present to us, a true revelation is only attained when the religious sense is aroused to perceive the Divine Presence.

In much popular thought it is supposed that there are other ways than this in which God may help our knowledge of Him. It is supposed that He may move in time and place, do certain things in one place which He does not do elsewhere, and do at one time what He has not done before. It is loose thought which thinks in this way. God acts unchangingly.

It is only unfolding, or unveiling, that can be referred to time and place.¹

Literalism, so far from correcting this loose thought, has rather encouraged the looseness. The four gospel documents which we possess are not written in scientific exactness. They are largely poetical. And indeed the earnest pursuit of truth forces a reader to recognise that the writers of the gospels were themselves affected by influences which made them unaware how inexact they were. Among those influences was the older Literalism, the Literalism in which the Old Testament had a verbal authority similar to that which was afterwards granted to the whole Bible. This state of matters is not sufficient to confuse a careful and instructed reader. But under the guidance of Literalism, one can hardly escape from going wrong. And especially with respect to the relations of the Divine actions to time and place, there are expressions which, literally followed, may lead the reader astray.² Error in this matter is avoided by

¹ This thought, though long neglected, has been essentially preserved in our *Scotch Confession of Faith*. Note there VIII. 6, quotation of "Lamb slain from the beginning of the world," etc. Cp. ch. ii. in entirety.

² For example, if one read together John i. 49, iii. 16, and iii. 36, which might seem, when read together, to imply that only those who have known the *historical* Christ can be saved. So if Luke

accurately grasping the idea of revelation. We have seen above how prevalent usage has dismembered this idea, and how a work of restoring it has begun in modern times. According to the idea in its soundness, the gospel itself is eternal, but God has unveiled Himself and His gospel specially to the world in the life of our Lord Jesus.

Connected with exact thinking on this subject is the importance of remembering that the person of Jesus our Lord was truly human. For the fact itself there is sufficient evidence; and the importance of it lies in the danger that exists of confusing the Divine Life with finite actions. There ever reappears the tendency towards supposing that a Divine action consists in some group of finite occurrences of an unusual kind. But the Divine, in its loftiest essence, is that which overrules the ordinary, not that which competes with and differs from the ordinary. Now finite occurrences of an unusual kind, while they are not the Divine action itself, are indeed the occasions of the Divine Life being revealed. And it is from this that the danger arises. But while in the case of this greatest

i. 35 be read along with John x. 8. But note clear doctrine in Luke i. 78 and John i. 9.

revelation the danger is threatened in a degree corresponding to its magnitude, it also affords a special safety. The safety is in the historical facts. The really telling divergence in the case of this revelation was not in externals, but in spiritual quality. Therefore it is both the purest of all revelations, and also one in which, for right knowledge, there is simply avoided the danger of confusing the temporal event with the unchanging reality. The Eternal was principally revealed in Jesus Christ through the stainless human character which appeared in him. And this fact is the more precious to us in that, as the religious sense thus perceives the Most High, it at the same time attains to a glimpse of the destiny of man, perceiving, through Jesus, an ideal man whom the Almighty acknowledges as His own child.

The notions which have grown up to the effect that Jesus was not subject to all human conditions are rightly explained as attempts to express that sacred perfectness of his life, in virtue of which he was the central revelation to the world.

The complete human nature of Jesus is an idea belonging to the *orthodox* doctrine, in every right sense of the word 'orthodox.' The early Church existing amidst a wild condition of the nations, did not

advance to a scientific arrangement of its ideas. But it took action to an extent in the way of preserving them in correctness. What it did was merely to repudiate firmly one error after another in regard to them. Thus historical orthodoxy has been a *series of disclaimers*. The Church disclaimed all views which its majorities considered to be unsound. It thereby preserved various ideas, even though it did not go on to expound their full relationship to one another. One idea which it thus successfully preserved was the complete human nature of Jesus. A class of views which it distinctly repudiated were all those that would destroy that idea. Thus said Ambrose: "As being man, therefore, He doubts; as man He is amazed. Neither His power nor His Godhead is amazed, but His soul. . . . As man, therefore, He is distressed, as man He weeps, as man He is crucified."¹ On the other hand, indeed, the Church ascribed to him complete Godhead. But it did not advance to an explanation of how it had been that he actually had doubted and been amazed as a man, and yet at the same time could be said to be the unchangeable God in the 'persona' of the Son. It remained content with accepting the representations of the first and third gospels. Individual writers, indeed, added to

¹ *On the Christian Faith*, II. vii. (56), De Romestin's translation.

those representations arbitrary applications; but these were hardly embodied in the creeds. The Church, in its creeds, left the matter a mystery. And as a mystery the doctrine of the two natures has been generally accepted. There is, however, no irreverence in receiving and using a key to much of the mystery, when it is found through the advance of thought. And such a key is found in that category of revelation which was used in great measure by the Apostle Paul, but afterwards neglected. Accepting the traditional statement 'Jesus is God,' one may apply the idea of revelation either to the subject or to the predicate. One may, by way of elucidation, either substitute for the 'is God' 'revealed God,' or substitute for the 'Jesus' "That eternal Jesus who was revealed in the man Jesus." To do this, so far from involving irreverence, may be an act of the most eager devotion. And it is the legitimate development of the orthodox doctrine.

It will thus be evident that 'Revelation' is a more exact idea than 'Incarnation,' in the ordinary connotation of that term, and contains the same essential thought. Revelation, in the case of the historical life of our Lord, defines what is meant by saying that He was God Incarnate.

In the original usage, indeed, in regard to the term

‘Incarnation,’ there was mingled another idea of indwelling, which is different from revelation. But in properly distinguishing and separating that other idea, one discovers that it applies more widely than to the historical life of Jesus Christ. That other idea took its start from the recognition of a ‘persona,’ or figure, in the Deity, called the *Logos*, or Word, and later called the Son. This ‘persona’ was distinguished from the Creator, and regarded as having gone forth from the Creator to give form to the world. It was thus recognised as the Principle whereby the world was made.¹ The idea, in its essentials, finds a place also in modern philosophical views ; and it is to be accepted as sound. According to it, God may be regarded as indwelling throughout the whole universe. And so, the further ‘incarnation’ in the case of Jesus in history is a centring of that pervading presence in the life of Jesus, so as to be, in a unique manner, an unveiling or Revelation.

The Incarnation, or Central Revelation, understood in this right way, is, in the first place, an open fact, testified to by the actions of countless devotees through many ages. “He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter

¹ Philo, *Quis rer. div. her.*, cc. 24, 38, and *de Op. Mundi*, c. 10 ; Colossians i. 16, John i. 3 ; Origen, *de Principiis*, i., ii. 4.

openeth; and the sheep hear his voice." It is plain, from all that has taken place in Christendom, that the worshippers of Jesus Christ have really seen in him the eternal God made known. They have not, indeed, attained thus to a perfect knowledge of God. But their own finite nature is itself enough to prevent any such knowledge. That as they turned their eyes towards Jesus, the true God was perceived by them, albeit dimly and often along with shadows which falsified His appearance, is proved by an unbroken course of aspirations and high-toned actions which cannot be gainsaid.

It may seem, then, as if the patent actions of Christendom are sufficient ground for the assertion of the sacred significance of Jesus's life. But obviously a confusion would arise in the matter if we could not know Jesus himself still, to an extent at least, and ever anew distinguish that element in him in virtue of which we can assert that God was unveiled in him.

The element must be something that appeals to our sense of God. Yet, as we have noticed, it has been proved historically to have been human in description. It is partly to be found in the *power* which his personality has shown in relation to the world. And this being asserted, leaves room for much difference of opinion as to the detailed ways in which

that power has been exercised. One 'miracle' stands before us—Jesus and the impression which he has made. This includes a marvellous achievement which his spirit made over evil in different forms even within the period of his short earthly life; but a question is left open as to how far we possess, in the gospel narratives, an exact record of that achievement in detail and how far these narratives contain an admixture of imaginative reception on the part of an unscientific age. What remains is that both in his earthly life and after it there has so victoriously acted a power which came from Jesus, that in that power itself there has been unveiled the Almighty God, who reigns above Nature. This thought, however, requires to be supplemented. To see God in Jesus, one must regard not his power merely, but his whole character. And in his purity, his searching honesty, his intellectual transcendence, his obedience unto death, and, perhaps greatest of all, his unparalleled compassion, we most fully perceive that special appearance which is ever worthy to be called the Central Revelation of the Most High to the world.

He came to "seek and to save that which was lost." He valued each human soul, and taught implicitly that the Eternal valued each so greatly as

to forgive without ceasing, and so directly as to number the very hairs of the head. He showed, in word and in deed both, that the value of man is realised when he lives in unflinching devotion to truth, brightened by continued kindness and respect towards others. He spoke the truth without compromise, though he saw that it was bringing to him an early, awful end of his life in this world. He stood alone, bearing a burden which others did not understand. Yet that burden was those others' own misfortunes—their estrangement from truth, their lack of spiritual health, their painful struggles, and their distresses. He was pointed at as a criminal by savage men, to whom he was a friend more tender than they had else on earth. Though gentle and loving, and keenly alive to the joys of nature and of human society, he walked with the firmness of a conqueror into the power of a torturing, abominable death. In dying, he forgave his murderers, saying that they knew not what they did. And after he had gone, the sense of God awoke in men. They looked back and perceived the Supreme as having dwelt in this Person who had shared their own nature. And they found in experience the same Sacred Being that there had dwelt, still living around them. So they apprehended a Presence, who is the

unchanging Son of God; and in and through this Son they saw also a Father and Creator—the “Father of mercies”¹—overspreading the whole world with a love and a wisdom which are alike unsearchable.

This revelation has brought Morality before the mind of man in the greatest completeness and in the most winning power in which it has been known in human history. Through this revelation, God has been perceived at the end of the moral bond, in an aspect that charms the soul to approach Him, even when it feels distressingly its measureless distance from Him. Sympathising, suffering with and for the struggling souls that have been born in time, so is God as revealed in Jesus Christ, even when viewed away at the end of the moral bond.

But in this revelation is also known the real glory of the gospel. Through it the soul vividly apprehends God as coming down to seek and to save—as doing this unchangingly. This idea of coming down to help is the essence of Christianity. Mysterious as it is, it is proved true by experience. This is God. As this idea conveys, so is God now known. And the unveiling in Jesus has occasioned the knowledge.

With the gospel there has been commonly connected the thought indicated by the word *atonement*.

¹ 2 Cor. i. 3.

There has been very generally recognised the need of an atonement between God and man, by which is meant such an aspect of the gospel as meets the necessity of *punishment* which the moral bond introduces. This also comes to knowledge in the Christian revelation. There becomes known that God vouchsafes to take the punishment upon Himself—first by suffering with and for man, and then by an inworking of purification, through which the necessity becomes gradually reduced, or gradually made subject to the Divine Reign. The atonement is, most simply, God suffering with and for us, as revealed in our Lord. It is based on the deeper fact of the Love and Care of the Eternal for each thinking being.

Many who have perceived by means of Literalism have made the atonement itself appear to be a new barrier between us and God. Perceiving, to begin with, ourselves alone in nearness, and God only in the distance, they have maintained that the atonement is dependent on an acceptance by our wills of an elaborate scheme, partly historical, partly metaphysical. And they have not been slow to add that a rejection of this scheme is more wicked in the sight of God than all other moral corruption. Thus, their first article of religion is that our unworthy condition is an impassable barrier between us and

the Almighty, their second that the removal of the barrier waits on an intricate act by our unworthy selves, which failing, in the case of any individual, the barrier is established, beyond hope in earth or heaven. Of those who have done this, some have held that the human act can only take place through Divine help; but they have agreed with the others in making all hope wait on the human act, and in rigidly defining what the act must be, in defiance of all differences in understanding, in opportunities, and in points of view. Often the human act, as they have defined it, has been made to involve blindness to the glory of the Divine Presence, and denial of the unchanging care and love. Oh, how they have tormented us in this! As for the initial barrier, our unworthiness, half of what they say would sink us in tribulation over our sin and misery, even if we were not already impressed with it. But they leave us with our helplessness. They do this by assuring us that the only hope of escape for all eternity is in an act of our own, to be performed in this brief, feeble stage of life. They see not God above all, and they forbid us to see Him. They would rob us of the assurance conveyed by His voice continually, that He loves us as we are, feeble as we are. They see ourselves only, and project the life of God into

the unknown. From the dread amazement which their doctrine induces, the refuge for every one is in the Brightness of Goodness that is in verity the Sovereign Soul, approached through humble supplication. In God Himself is the atonement; and in Him, preceding both our estrangement and the atonement, is an adorable, infallible Care.

CHAPTER VII.

PAUL AND THE GOSPEL.

UNDER the influence of Jesus Christ, a new world-prophet arose within the nation of ancient Israel. This was the Apostle Paul. The gifts which were bestowed upon him were great enough to make him rank with the most illustrious of his countrymen who had previously possessed the prophetic genius. But he had one gift which distinguished him from all these, namely, a power of appropriating, and of directing attention to, the revelation which in his time had been given to the world. He himself recognised that his discernment of the revelation in Jesus was that which constituted his chief claim to be heard. And accordingly he came forward, with no want of confidence indeed, but simply as an apostle of Jesus. For him to live was Christ, he said. And he professed to proclaim nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

To understand St. Paul's reading of the gospel

full weight must be given to his personal prophetic gifts. He was no mere collector of historical evidence. To regard him as such is both to do himself injustice and to miss the significance of the message which he had to declare. He was, to begin with, a member of the inspired race, an inheritor of the faculty and habit of religious insight. Even as such, he stands out from the great writers of his time in the other nations. His frame burned with moral zeal; and he never questioned the reality of the One Supreme. But also he was inspired pre-eminently. He was an arouser of perception—a prophet, as Moses had been, as Isaiah had been, and as some of the Psalmists had been. Thus he was conscious of standing, like the writer of the 139th psalm, “before the face of God” (*enopion tou Theou*).¹ And he based his apostleship on his experience of revelations—chiefly of one revelation, or special appearance of God.

It is reasonable to believe that there was a time in which his religious perception was guided by that Literalism which had come to prevail among his compatriots. It is recorded that he had been a careful student of the Pharisees’ culture; and it is reasonable to believe that that culture had helped him to attain to genuine, if imperfect, glimpses of the Divine

¹ Gal. i. 20.

Presence. Under it he may especially have grasped the solemn fact of man's moral relation to God, and so much of the being of God as secured to him, for ever after, the apprehension of One Eternal Sovereign. But from the guidance of Literalism he was suddenly converted. A new gleam suddenly shone on him.

The new gleam was a power of the kind that has affected the highest class of prophets as such. It came direct to his individual soul from the Divine Presence. It thus contained an element which was unshared by others. But nevertheless it had something in common with a light which had certainly guided others. So that it combined the characters of a direct light and a general light. What was in common between the light which shone on Paul and that which led the others was the medium in which the revelation appeared to Paul. Paul discerned a special appearance of God in a medium in which God had been for some time seen by a group of Paul's contemporaries. It seems, indeed, to be beyond question that his perception was clearer and more commanding than that of any other ; but his revelation was properly the appropriation of a general revelation, and a group of others perceived along with him. That group was the lately formed Christian Church. In common with a still

obscure body of persons who had more or less intimate knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth, Paul centred in the figure of Jesus his new perception of God.

Thoughtfully viewing St. Paul and his conversion, however, we must not conclude that his former leading had no influence on his later perception. Even in the first sudden action of the newly illumined eyesight, the old influences need not have been entirely dormant. And as his spiritual vision became fixed, it certainly owed something of its defining ability to his former spiritual guides. Thus some little analysis of the light which had formerly guided his perceptions, along with those of many earnest students of his time, may here be profitable. In it there can be detected at least three important constituents. One of these was the thought of a coming Messiah, a person having a unique participation in the Divine mind, yet of the nation of Israel, and of the tribe of Judah, appointed at once to glorify the people of Israel as the chosen of God and to rule the world in the name of God. A second constituent was the faith, held positively by the Pharisees, that after death the personal human soul would, if righteous, rise again!¹ And a third was the half-Greek mental culture which prevailed among those Jews who were

¹ Acts xxiii. 8 ; Josephus, *Antiquities*, xviii. (1) 3.

scattered over the world, especially among those who had settled in Alexandria. This was not, properly speaking, an element of Phariseeism; but it could not fail to have some influence on all Jews of education, and it can be proved to have affected Paul, from his own writings.

But besides his early educational guidance, there certainly influenced Paul to a degree, the fixed thoughts which prevailed among his new associates, the Christians. These thoughts mainly were, that Jesus was the Messiah, whom the older prophets had promised; that even his sufferings had been predicted, and were necessary for the fulfilment of his office; and that he was proved, by the experience of many,¹ to have risen from the dead and to be still alive.

Both these sources of influence acted on Paul. They combined with his special leading in defining to him the gospel message. They may be believed to have entered into the first sudden awakening; and they can be detected in the view which he afterwards maintained.

Paul, formerly called Saul, had been a persecutor of the Christians. It is related that he had gone so far as to enter houses, seize men and women on the

¹ Acts i. 3.

charge of being Christians, and commit them to prison. Strange conduct, does one say, for a man who had ever so dim a vision of the Divine Presence. Ascribe it to the shadows cast by the lamp of Literalism. What he did was no more than many did in a far later age, when again artificial light was made to limit religious discernment. In the course of his persecuting experience, he was connected with, and probably witnessed the death of, an eminent disciple of Jesus. This was Stephen, who had spoken boldly and uncompromisingly against materialistic views, had said publicly that he "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,"¹ had been seized indignantly by the traditional religious party, and had been slain, calling on the name of Jesus, and, like Jesus himself, praying for his enemies. Some time afterwards, Paul was travelling from Jerusalem to Damascus, still in pursuance of schemes for persecuting the Christians. He had companions with him; but he, as now is evident, was in an abstraction, apart from them. He was thinking, one may believe, of the Most High, whom he desired to serve, and of the course of conduct by which he was trying to do so. Perhaps the scene of Stephen's heroic testimony and death floated before

¹ Acts vii. 55, 56.

him. And certainly He in whose service Stephen had died, was ever and again in his thoughts. The whole story of that martyr-life for which others were willing to make themselves martyrs, was probably engaging his attention. Suddenly, as his mind was away from earthly things—suddenly, as he gazed on a range of objects hidden from his fellow-travellers, he perceived an unveiling of the Eternal. He apprehended Jesus; but of what character the apprehension was, and what it involved as to knowledge of the external and finite, is of subordinate importance. As he apprehended Jesus, his sense of God perceived the Divine Presence; he attained to an intuition of the Divine Being, and that which he saw he called afterwards the Son of God.

Paul regularly alluded to the revelation which he had known as an appearance of Christ as risen. And he always spoke of the Risen Christ as the centre of hope. It would be interesting to be able to determine how far his experience not only made sure of the Eternal as revealed in Jesus, but penetrated into the continued human existence of Jesus. To do this with certainty, however, cannot be said to be granted to us. The apostle indeed indicates his certainty of the continued human existence; but the connection of that with this experience of his is

not made clear.¹ And is there not here repeated to us the continual lesson of the Divine Government? Are we not here reminded that in regard to the promise of resurrection after death, we are bidden seek our certainty not in anything earthly, not even in information conveyed through earthly channels, but in God Himself, the Giver of the promise, who in His condescension loves us and seeks our love and trust!²

But does some one say, if Paul's experience was as it has just been described, there was something vague and visionary about it; it was not really perceiving, it was only imagining? To speak thus is to mistake the kinds and possibilities of real perception. Paul, as the evidence indubitably declares, perceived—did not merely imagine—with the sense that runs through the whole being. With that sense he perceived an appearance of the Eternal and Unchangeable. With that sense; for only with it is there possible a perception of the Divine. For this special awakening of the sense in Paul, Jesus was the occasion. On the question of the action of Jesus himself in the matter, viewed as still human, there is no call here to enter. It was the revelation, the special appearance of God Himself, that moved Paul

¹ See especially 1 Cor. xv. 12, 35, 37.

² See Paul's own teaching, Rom. iv. 17, 2 Cor. i. 9.

for the future. And to be sceptical about the power to do so of an object of the religious sense, is both to underestimate the convincingness of that chief of all senses, and to neglect the natural relation of the soul to God.

We have no direct record of the apostle's first teachings after this revelation had made him a Christian. But there is reason to believe that he at first kept in the background the individual element in his perception of the revelation, and emphasised what was in common between himself and other believers in Jesus. The narrative in the Acts speaks of him as joining with the Church modestly; and his own account in Galatians is in accordance with that.¹ This is, further, in agreement with the character of the early First Epistle to the Thessalonians, in which, along with Timothy and Silas, he addressed the youthful Church in very general terms.

But afterwards Paul explicitly set forth the gospel message according to the manner of comprehension which had been given to himself. We find his own message specially in his four great epistles—those to the Galatians, to the Corinthians (two), and to the Romans.

In the Epistle to the Galatians he informs us

¹ i. 23.

plainly of the kind of experience which made him a Christian. He says there distinctly that he received the 'gospel' (*euangelion*) through the 'revelation' (*apokalypsis*) of Jesus Christ, and that God revealed 'His Son' within the Apostle himself (*en emoi*).¹

In his epistles generally he makes several remarks which are explanatory of what he meant by 'revelation.' He says he went up to Jerusalem "according to revelation"²; he thanks God for the condition of his Corinthian readers, who, he says, are waiting for the 'revelation'³ of Jesus Christ; he speaks of both the 'anger'⁴ of God, the 'righteousness'⁵ of God, and the "things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,"⁶ as being 'revealed'; he says the world has been waiting for the 'revelation' of the "sons of God"⁷; he records that he once knew a man (himself?) who was carried up to the third heaven in a revelation.⁸ These passages give a clear and unmistakable testimony. If it is going too far to maintain that he consciously discriminated his use of the word 'revelation' from the popular usage which in all time has more or less prevailed, yet the occurrences which he generally indicated when he

¹ Gal. i. 12, 16.² Gal. ii. 2.³ 1 Cor. i. 7.⁴ Rom. i. 18.⁵ Rom. i. 17.⁶ 1 Cor. ii. 10.⁷ Rom. viii. 19.⁸ 2 Cor. xii. 1, 2.

used the word were, plainly, unveilings of the Divine Presence, which is always there, itself unchanging.

Specialising slightly, what was revealed to the Apostle Paul was the 'Son' of God. That is to say, he perceived a Second Figure (or 'persona') in the Deity. His thought hardly went so far as the Alexandrian thinker Philo had gone, or as the later Christians were to go, who conceived of a Second Figure as within the Divine Life from the beginning. With Paul, the Son seems to have been only thought of as having been foreordained from the beginning, and to have come into life in the earthly appearance of Jesus,¹ or, still more strictly, after the bodily death of Jesus.² This is obviously a half-formed thought. Perhaps Paul really got beyond it. And whether or no, it must be carried further, in justice to the thinker himself. This 'Son' apprehended by Paul must have existed from all eternity. Otherwise Paul would not have been discerning the true God, as both his utterances generally and his actions declare him to have been.

The 'Son of God' was to Paul at the same time the Ideal Man, or the Divine *Persona* towards

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 47. Coloss. i. 15, if from Paul's own hand, would modify this.

² Rom. i. 4. 'Separated' or 'determined' to be the Son of God. Cp. Ephes. i. 20.

whose perfection man is growing. He was not only the "Lord from heaven," but the "second Adam."¹

Paul mystically identified this Son of God with Jesus Christ. Mystically! That is to say, having attained to the perception through contemplation of Jesus, he afterwards disregarded the human life of Jesus, and used the name 'Christ' for the Second Figure in the Being of God. Not that he denied the complete human nature of Jesus. On the contrary, he asserted it. Jesus, he said, was of the seed of David, "according to the flesh."² But the mysticism of his idea of the matter was connected with his failing to bring into explicit thought the pre-existence and the eternity of the Son of God. And thus here also, in order truly to grasp his ideas, we must carry them beyond his own expression of them. Jesus had been the 'revelation' of this Son of God, as he plainly tells. Logical reflection requires one to go further, and make a distinction between the truly human Jesus and the Eternal revealed in Jesus. This distinction was afterwards made by the Church, but only in its usual disjoining, disclaiming manner.³ The Church asserted more than it

¹ Gal. iv., Rom. viii., 1 Cor. xv.

² Rom. i. 3, ix. 5.

³ See above, page 77. Cp. Athan. Creed, vers. 32-34.

explained; Paul gave an explanation for more than he asserted.

A propitiation for man's sins—a satisfaction for the anger of God and a refuge from man's painful self-blame—was, according to Paul, “set forth” by God in Jesus. This arose from the fact that in Jesus there was a ‘declaration’¹ of the righteousness of God Himself. This righteousness of God Himself, the apostle taught, both justifies man, so as to give him hope of pardon, and also becomes a new spring of righteous action on his own part. Carrying out the distinction just stated, the implicit, if not the explicit, doctrine here, is that God is eternally righteous, that the Son eternally obeys the Father, that this was unveiled in Jesus, and thus that through Jesus we see, first, the kind God suffering for us and caring for us, and, second, the example and stimulus that lead us to our own destined life.

Paul was the greatest literary initiator of theological ideas whom the world has known, and the greatest prophet after the Sacred Prophet. But his thought was left unshaped; and from many hurried statements, which are little more than echoes of his education,² one must discriminate the

¹ Rom. iii. 25, *endeixin*.

² Such are Rom. ix. 20–22, 2 Cor. vi. 14–18.

fervent, vehemently affectionate message of his own 'enlarged'¹ heart. His greatest continued pieces of composition are the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians and the eighth chapter of Romans. His greatest single utterance is the conclusion of this last named chapter, speaking of the love of God, which prevails over every 'creature' known or imagined. And, perhaps, his greatest phrase is this description which he gives of the Divine Being, God who "makes the dead alive, and summons forth the things that exist not, as things that do exist."² In these expressions we are to read what St. Paul saw from the day in which the light shone on him near Damascus, till the day on which he followed his Master by dying for the truth. Paul's gospel was the declaration of One ever near us, who above all imagination is kind, a "Father of mercies," an Ideal who is an ever-living Redeemer, One in thought of whom we can humbly find refuge from accusing conscience, the Source of free and infinite forgiveness, the Centre of a worship into which the soul throws itself of its own accord, in modesty and self-repression, but in full trustfulness and uncontrollable zeal.

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 11.

² Rom. iv. 17. Cp. 1 Cor. i. 27-29.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TEMPORARY DARKENING.

THOSE who lived near the time of Jesus, and were brought under his influence, were elevated to stand, in a way, side by side with the prophets. As if using one common organ of vision, they attained to the perception of a special revelation. And—to apply the words of the Master himself, perhaps with a more personal meaning than he at first gave to them—"many prophets and righteous men had desired to see those things which they saw, and had not seen them, and to hear those things which they heard, and had not heard them."

As the revealing earthly life retreated into the past, did the revelation as such go with it? or was it only preserved in the form of an ordinary defining agency, or of an embodiment originating from it but not possessing its clearness or its fulness of power? That would be in accordance with the ordinary course of things; but if there had been nothing

exceptional in this case, then it would be hardly correct to speak of Jesus as a revelation to the modern world. There was, in the case, something exceptional; and yet, the ordinary process took place to an extent, and took place with certain most marked characteristics.

The exceptional in the case was, that the figure of Jesus, viewed very generally but with historical correctness, remained ever in the background of human knowledge, distinct from the limiting representations of it; and that it blended with the Divine Presence itself, as a power to light the path from time to time, when the ordinary lamp failed. In accordance with this state of matters one may say that revelations to individuals in modern times have but repeated the revelation in Jesus; or, in other words, that in the experience of these revelations it is practically impossible to distinguish what is entirely new from what the observer has brought to the perception from knowledge of Jesus.

The ordinary process took place to an extent, nevertheless. The revelation in great measure became history; and, imperceptibly but rapidly, the ordinary guidance of Christians was transferred from it to an artificial agency which was constructed in consequence of it. An artificial light was formed,

partly out of the words and deeds of Jesus as the following generation was able to receive them, partly out of epistles written by leaders in the early Church, partly out of the Old Testament Scriptures, and partly out of a *thought about Scripture* which was inherited from the Judaistic religion. Gospel narratives, epistles, and Old Testament books were constituted into what came to be called a 'canon,' or rule for faith; and the thought of their Divine authority, in literalness, became the completed guiding agency. Under this thought, which was to become the ordinary light of Europe for many centuries, a large amount of experience has been recorded; but it is difficult to find in it much that is akin to the experience of the old prophets and of Paul.

Immediately after Paul, the artificialising process seems to have begun. Even the latest of the books of the New Testament itself, while they still impress us with the possession of genuine prophetic power, distinctly show the beginning of this process. The Johannine writings are specially interesting in this connection. In the gospel and epistles which bear the name of John, the thought of the author himself shows a narrowing of religious comprehension which is beyond dispute. God is no longer, as in the

Sermon on the Mount, represented as of boundless care; nor is man directed to those infinitely broad interests which are opened up to view in the more simply recorded teaching of the Master. Love to fellow-Christians replaces love to the unthankful and the evil; one is bidden pray for another so long as the sin is "not unto death,"¹ instead of to forgive "until seventy times seven"; and (with one apparent exception² which may not be a real exception) the name of "our Father which art in heaven," by which Jesus taught us to address the Most High, is no longer, in any connection, to be found. On the other hand, indeed, though the narrowing process is there, inspiration is, in these books, still preserved. We are indebted to them for some valuable theological conceptions, for much suggestive thought, for the saying "God is love," and for the aphorism that he who loves God will love his brother also. On account of this, these works deserve all respect, even apart from the precious fact that the Gospel of John presents much of Jesus himself, as well as the evangelist's own treatment of the subject. For assuredly, even in due recognition of all critical discoveries, we shall not be driven from the belief that it is the voice of Jesus still echoing that has won for this gospel so wide-

¹ 1 John v. 16.

² John xx. 17.

spread an affection.¹ Still, all this being observed, the Johannine writer himself has only too plainly narrowed the spirit of the teaching and of the whole sacred appearance.

With the writings of the Church 'Fathers,' however, the daylight is left behind. We follow the movements of persons who have entered a dark channel, taking with them a small lamp sufficient to give the light which their purpose requires. Their lamp is already Bible-literalism. And their knowledge of the Divine Life is that which was described here in the first chapter. The gracious aspect of the Supreme, as He appears in Jesus's words and in Jesus's character, passes almost out of notice. It is but little alluded to by the 'Fathers'; and it but little affects their own spirit. The Divine in Nature, in spite of some speculations in formal metaphysics, is not taken seriously into account. God is regarded as terrible only, far away from nature and from man. Appalling shadows, also, are accepted as real things. And worse than this, the 'Fathers' are, in many cases, not appalled by the shadows, so unmoved are they by the higher attributes of the Divine Life. Yet they behold the moral bond between man and

¹ I tried to make good the assertion here ventured on, in my study of *The Saviour in the newer light*.

God. They have a zeal for morality, but almost none for charity.

Many cultured persons, indeed, revere the Christian writers of the post-apostolic ages nearly as highly as they do the Biblical writers themselves. Erudite and assuredly gentle and courteous clergymen of the Church of England translate and introduce, in a tone of unqualified veneration as towards some 'Saint,' unamiable discussions, studded with exclamations in which Christian kindness, forgiveness, charity, care for the erring and the lost, and, of all things, faith in One Heavenly Father, are entirely absent.

Where such learned admirers can bring before us passages from those writers showing real spiritual power, let us second their loyal admiration. That such passages exist, is not here denied. One does, certainly, at places in the patristic writings, come on thoughts regarding sacred things in general, of a really high order. The following, by Tatian, is, perhaps, hardly a pure example, inasmuch as the writer became a 'heretic.' But it shows that inspiration could revive at moments; and we shall rarely meet anything much finer anywhere. Speaking of the hope of resurrection, Tatian of the second century says: "Even if fire make my flesh to disappear altogether, the world has received the matter as become

vapour ; and if in rivers, if in seas I am dispersed, if by wild beasts I am torn to pieces, I am laid up in the store-rooms of a wealthy lord.”¹

Also, the tendency to look back to that early age with a peculiar reverence is amply justified by the very fact of what was achieved in it for the moral side of truth, and by the nobility of life which was the immediate consequence. This will come before us next chapter.

Still further, the Fathers accomplished, for religious knowledge, a defensive work, which requires careful notice. Along with the Church of their time, they effectually defended certain root-ideas, as has been mentioned in former chapters.² They did not grasp the most beautiful thoughts which came from the Christian revelation ; but certain great ideas, which were capable of blooming and bearing fruit in sunnier surroundings, were preserved by them. It is a subject of much interest, the history of early ‘heresy,’ and the Church’s condemnation of it. Granted that, in view of the intolerance and abuse of the Churchmen, our sympathies are aroused in favour of the ‘heretics,’ granted also that we have every reason to doubt that the ‘heretics’ views were quite as the

¹ Address to the Greeks, ch. vi.

² Above, pages 77 and 98.

Churchmen represented them, as we have every reason to disbelieve entirely that they were themselves the bad men that they were called, still, there is to be observed a strange movement, which we may without impropriety ascribe to higher direction, setting aside the fantastic, and saving, if unconnected yet intact for future growth, the sound and rational.

With all this there may be noticed that the faults and the deficiencies of those ancient theologians are mitigated by some endeavour, on their own part, to avoid the errors which were gaining hold. A more liberal tone has rightly been distinguished in some as compared with others; notably in the case of the early Clement of Alexandria and Origen, as contrasted with the later Augustine.¹

But all these points being admitted and recognised, will even any special student and admirer of the patristic literature decline to endorse the statement that it indicates, generally speaking, a great darkening in regard to religious discernment? The thought of almost all the Fathers is formal and contentious. There is little in it of that fresh opening up of new aspects, which belongs to the discoverer of realities in all the sides of life. Even reverence cannot deny the return of a 'blindness' upon the guides in religion.

¹ Made much of recently by Rev. C. E. Beeby, *Creed and Life*.

And what of the shadows which those men mistook for real things? No reader of this treatise could be more inclined than is the writer, to miss over the page which now comes naturally in the account of our subject. That which the page has to set forth has been too dreadfully important for us to miss it over. But it may rightly be made as simple as possible; and the general facts entitle us to traverse it hurriedly. Catching at shadows, fusing several of them into one, those early theologians promulgated the doctrine which, taken all round, has its proper interpretation in being the last extreme of horror to which the groping of man's unaided mind may lead.

'Justin the Martyr' stated this doctrine in hideous exactness. He said, speaking as expressing the prophetic teaching: "And He will raise the bodies of all men that have been, and those of the worthy He will clothe with immortality, but those of the unjust He will send, in eternal sensation (*en aisthesei aionia*), with the wicked demons, into the eternal fire."¹ Later Fathers went further. Even the comparatively gentle Chrysostom explained the benign words of Paul in 1 Cor. iii. 15 to mean that the man would live on, in flames, while only his work would be freed from existence.² And the acute Augustine, writing after

¹ *First Apologia*, ch. lii.

² Homily on that passage.

the end of the fourth century, laboured to prove the possibility of a person being everlastingly burned without dying, taking the example of the animal called the 'salamander,' which, he said, could live in fire.¹ Oh, ghastly triumph in the way of an argument! And that was a 'Saint.' Fortunately modern naturalists will not allow even the 'salamander' to give its services to such inhuman thought.

How can we maintain an uncritical attitude in relation to the Fathers of the Church when we meet such things in their writings? And how are we to take up the unmodified cry, that the teaching which comes down from them is a message of comfort to the poor sinner? It may be true that some of those teachers did not distinctly set forth the unspeakable doctrine, and that others, though proclaiming it, gave some qualification to it.² And this is enough to accept with profound thankfulness. But still, the doctrine is there. Nor do we find it applied only to people of unusual wickedness. Some of the most

¹ *Civ. Dei*, xxi. 2 and 4. Cp. also Tertullian, *de Spectaculis*, ch. xxx., quoted by Gibbon in his famous 15th ch., and Ambrose, *Christian Faith*.

² Farrar, in his nobly-conceived work, *Eternal Hope*, defends a number of the earlier Fathers from the charge of holding this doctrine. Also the Rev. T. Allin, in *Universalism Asserted*, has brought vast erudition and research to bear on such distinction.

respected of those theologians applied it to many persons simply on account of their not entertaining the approved theological ideas.¹

Let us pass over, with a touch, the way in which some of those writers spoke of other thinkers, who did not agree with them. The touch is needed, in order that their spiritual position may be thoroughly understood, but we may yield to the natural shrinking from dwelling on this theme. For a Churchman to call one whom he believed to be intellectually in the wrong "a vessel of perdition"² or an enemy of Christ,³ was a mild example of the vilifying in which some indulged. We cannot but judge that it was merciless hands into which the reputation of those poor 'heretics' fell. And we are driven to ask wonderingly, as we contemplate those 'Fathers' in general, where is their delicate kindness, where their tenderness for an erring brother, where their enthusiasm for the lost? Are these indeed the disciples of One who rebuked all haughtiness, and cared for those who were spoken evil of, even if they

¹ Iren. Heresies, ii. 32, § 2, the heretic will "pass into the destruction of fire"; iii. 11, the Montanists have committed the 'irremissible sin.' Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, xxi. 25.

² Ambrose, *Christian Faith*, v. 19; cp. iii. 5 (38).

³ Athanasius, of persons among whom was the historian Eusebius (Epistle in defence of Nicene Formula, ii. 3). Worse examples in Tertullian, etc.

had many faults? Are these the successors of the impetuous, but warm-hearted Apostle to the Nations, who wrote even to such untrained persons as the early Christians at Corinth, so modestly, so respectfully, and so gently?

Let the cause be found partly in the savage condition of the world at the time, and partly in the absorbing power of the one mighty strife after moral living, in which those men were engaged. Nature at that time wore an aspect which was peculiarly trying for gentleness and forgiveness. Even in the days of the Apostle Paul himself, the hope expressed for the Christians was, "That ye may be blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life."¹ It was little wonder that in the steeling of the soul to meet continued persecution, charity was neglected. And the Roman Empire presented to the religious sense clouds dense enough and unbroken enough to obscure for many a struggler the ever-caring countenance of God.

¹ Phil. ii. 15.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WORKS IN THE FEEBLE LIGHT.

THE Christian people who lived at the time when the revelation in Jesus Christ had become succeeded by temporary darkness, accomplished, in the feeble light to which they had recourse, moral victories before which one can but be silent in admiration. And so influential have those victories been, that they not only justify a reverential attitude towards the age of the early Fathers, but demand a special chapter in any work that deals with the history of the gospel-message.

It is not given to our weak and growing natures to make any other than a small achievement at one time. Hence it is not to be expected that large bodies of people will be found thinking greatly and acting greatly at once. Last chapter introduced us to the falling away of our race in the power of sacred thinking just after there had been vouchsafed to it an entrancing revelation. But the surprise and dis-

appointment which such an event might otherwise cause, may well vanish if it turns out that at that very time our race was attaining to a colossal practical advance. And this was indeed the case. The Christian Church was giving practical effect to the Christian revelation itself. Thought was pausing that work might occupy the attention. There was no real interference with the fact that a new era had begun.

The period of early Christianity, indeed, while dark in regard to sacred knowledge, was a period in which human nature made an unparalleled spring into newness of practical life. Much, it is true, of what had shone forth in Jesus was neglected and forgotten. But one thing was noticed. This was Morality, or the bond and path between man and God. And, in consequence, a revolution in practical interests occurred. Man had discovered that another region, besides Nature, was given him to inhabit. All else receded before this discovery. Man scaled the barrier which was stretched around Nature, and rushed into the region which had hitherto been but little explored.

We may well, accordingly, venerate the early Christian ages. Morality is half of sublunary existence. And until we are acquainted with it, our true

selves are less than half alive. Little wonder, then, that when first it was brought into clear and general observation, and invaded by a band that shouted to others to follow them, the sacred in Nature and the sacred Rule above Nature were alike left behind, to be thought of at another time. This was a time of pioneering. It was rough, and involved strife and sacrifice; but it showed forth the strength and the aspiration which are resident in the human soul, and produced heroes.

Many men of reflection had known something of Morality before. Many other men had had impulsive premonitions of it, and we have seen how one nation had specially been roused to the perception of it. But it had never been discerned half so clearly, and the sense of the general multitude had never been so fully or so enthusiastically aroused to perceive it. The force which now produced the enthusiastic awakening was, *par excellence*, the revelation in our Lord Jesus itself. But the activity of perception was sustained by the circulation of the Hebrew Scriptures, Old Testament and New Testament together.¹ And soon the thought of these became connected with the recognition of their Divine authority in literalness. Thus this is to be conceded

¹ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, c. xxix.

to Literalism, that under its guidance the steady march along the moral path was continued. Its light was sufficient to show the moral region in clear distinctness from Nature. This was what was wanted for the achievement of the early Christians. Their achievement was one not of searching study, but of practical triumph. Just seeing Morality, they began an exercise of human faculty such as had never been known before.

They separated themselves from all the ways of the world. They lived in continuous appeal to the Fountain of purity. They in many cases denied themselves every manner of direct pleasure. And when misunderstood and subjected to shame and suffering, they remembered their Master, still praised God, and walked with a strange happiness even into the jaws of death. So, in the power of Jesus, they magnified our common being.

We know that much of the activity of the early Church was not beyond criticism even as moral activity. Their moral action was so placed in opposition to Nature that it became in many respects morbid, and also failed to affect the lives of many who might have been influenced by more genial guidance. The purity of motive, however, which prevailed generally, at least in the first few genera-

tions, is well assured to us. Genuine moral effort spread from one to another. And this is the point of importance. Persistently the Church held on, amidst a carnival of demons which grew up out of the abuse of liberty permitted in a great empire, till in time it became the strongest power in the world. And though it was still to run a course of much error, much negligence, and even much lapse into moral lethargy, it had accomplished its marvellous work. Human life had received a new set. It would never again quite cease to move along the path which leads to the true Source of its welfare.

CHAPTER X.

A CHRISTIAN GUIDANCE THAT IS NOT LITERALISTIC.

LITERALISM up to the present century has never been formally repudiated by any large section of Christendom. From the second century to the nineteenth, it has enjoyed a remarkable dominion. Up to the threshold of our time, Catholics and Protestants have been practically at one in leaving it unquestioned.

Another light, however, superseded it in real usage during the early Christian ages; and that other still prevails among those who are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church. That light is *Church-guidance*. It is what the early Protestants called *Popery*. It is akin to Literalism through its main constituents. But it has also in its composition a very important fresh element. The fresh element is a certain adaptation which Protestants regard as human in character. Keeping to the imagery which is presupposed in this sketch,

one may say that the light of Literalism was made to pass through a film of particular interpretation and variation, and that by this means it was transformed into the Catholic Church Guidance.

From this second guiding agency a large part of Christendom afterwards turned away entirely. And for the revulsion real grounds existed. The strongest of these were on the practical side. There is no call for us here to inquire into the moral soundness of such actions as may have been the results of the Catholic guidance. It is enough to look at the guiding principle itself. It was reasonable that the mind should protest against being guided in practical details by pronouncements which the common understanding regarded as human. On the side of theory also, real grounds for the rebellion were not wanting. So many new assertions were made under the leading, of a kind that disagreed with ordinary experience, that reason was threatened with complete confusion as to what was real and what was not. But on the side of theory there was also a fact of an opposite character, which was neglected by the earlier Protestants. This was a softening influence for those harsh appearances which Literalism had declared to be real. Some notice has been taken of this above. The most important example of it is

found in the hope which arose early in Church history, that the merely ordinary wicked man might have before him only a purgatory, from which there would be an escape.¹

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was, on the side of practice, a demand that no human determinant should any longer intervene between man and his conscience.

On the side of theory, the Protestant Reformation had two aspects.

It was in one view the revival of the bareness and pitilessness of the letter. Like some violent assailant upon the anæsthetics of modern medical treatment, demanding that in future the pain be felt in all its racking power, so Calvin and our own Knox sternly returned to the method of Augustine, so as to outdo that earlier reasoner, and argued all points from the letter of the Bible with merciless logic.² In this aspect, Protestantism was not a step forwards. If the sense of God leads away from some of the teaching given by the Church of Rome, it not less completely makes us revolt against such an utterance as this: "Let it stand, therefore, as an

¹ Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, xx. 25.

² For Knox, see Interview with Queen Mary, in M'Crie's *Life of Knox*, Period VI. "You interpret the Scriptures in one way," said the queen, etc. Calvin, *Institutes*, I., vi. 3.

indubitable truth, which no engines can shake, that the mind of man is so entirely alienated from the righteousness of God that he cannot conceive, desire, or design anything but what is wicked, distorted, foul, impure and iniquitous: that his heart is so thoroughly envenomed by sin that it can breathe out nothing but corruption and rottenness: that if some men occasionally make a show of goodness, their mind is ever interwoven with hypocrisy and deceit, their soul inwardly bound with the fetters of wickedness.”¹ Where Literalism guides, this conclusion may logically be reached; but it is neither Pauline nor properly Biblical, and it is not true.

But this is a very insufficient aspect in which to view the Protestant Reformation. It was, more fully and more really, the beginning of a demand, that each soul might be permitted to see clearly in the unchanging light, and to be subject only to such subordinate guidance as would not contradict the light of day. It was the beginning of dissatisfaction with Literalism as well as with Church-guidance. It was a first, still confused apprehension of a position which required a different kind of light.

In due time that position has, by increasing numbers, become recognised. And almost before it

¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, English translation by Beveridge, II., v. 19.

has been recognised, the light which is suitable to it has been emerging. For more than one generation now, many have been guided unconsciously, and some avowedly, by a defining agency which is special as having had an earthly history, and yet presents no contradiction to the leadings of the eternal Divine Manifestation.

This newer light requires to be thought of and described with some carefulness. One must avoid all temptation to give it a name from any individual predilections, and must endeavour to specify it in accordance with its prevailing actuality. No great error will be made if it be called the light of *Christian influences*. It is made up of thoughts, sentiments, and fancies, which often correct the light of Bible-literalism. But it has in common with that light a historical connection with the life on earth of Jesus Christ.

We have seen that a general remembrance of the figure of Jesus had all along stood in the background of knowledge, blending with the Divine Presence itself, and at times taking the place of the ordinary guidance which might be prevailing. Now, however, we have to observe that a new fixing, or forming, of that remembrance occurred, and resulted in such a creation of thoughts, fancies, and sentiments, as

amounted to the emergence of a new agency for defining the objects of sacred perception. This new agency is traceable to the unveiling of the Divine Life in the historical life of Jesus Christ. It is thus originally but a training into fixed paths of the never-changing brightness that is around us. It has a form which it has received like any other defining agency; but it has such a spiritual largeness and such an adaptability, that under it error becomes, comparatively speaking, impossible.

Two forces hastened the process in which the newer light took form. One was dissatisfaction with the objects disclosed by Literalism, or with the aspects of the objects, due to the growing comparison of them with what was disclosed by the eternal light, the noon-day manifestation of God. The other was dissatisfaction with Literalism itself, and the genus to which it belongs, due to the revived consciousness that God is near, not only far away, and that we have all, in real truth, feeble and corrupt as we are, a faculty by which to perceive Him.

Without doubt, many movements from the time of the Reformation gave warning that this newer agency was preparing to emerge. Calvin alludes, with disapproval, to certain persons who rejected the Scriptures, and yet claimed to have the leading

of the Divine Spirit.¹ From these, who would seem to have been extremists, to the later Swedenborg and his followers, who venerated the Bible, but emphatically distinguished the spirit from the letter, a steady preparation must have been going on. Also, the Reformers themselves, regarded generally, must be credited with having been impressed by higher guidance than the Literalism which they were instrumental in restoring to the throne. "God," said Zwingli, "is everywhere present, and wherever we call upon Him in spirit and in truth, He answers us in the words, Here I am."² And when one reads the words of Luther, in which he tells of the pain which it cost him to resist the Church, and of his growing strength, one cannot but ascribe to him a direction which came from influences loftier than a mere new canonical dictation.³

But the newer Christian guidance did not emerge in strength until there took place that movement of thought which, in the eighteenth century, investigated the grounds of all knowledge and the substance of all being. This philosophical movement, beginning with sceptical inquiries as to all

¹ *Institutes*, i., ch. ix, § 1.

² *Life*, by Christoffel, translated by Cochrane, p. 25.

³ Michelet's *Life of Luther*, translated by Hazlitt, pp. 65, 67.

sides of experience, culminated in a revival, in the minds of German thinkers, of the ancient view of Plato, according to which the ideal or spiritual is in all real things, and is presupposed in every act of knowledge. The old proofs for the existence of God had been questioned among other matters; and the answer given by the revived philosophy to this questioning was that the whole prevailing manner of thought was wrong. There was pointed out that it had been altogether erroneous to start with human subjects as complete in themselves, and then to try to prove God by deduction from the human subjects and the world. In other words, what was pointed out was that the way of thought was erroneous according to which God was held to be only in the distance, and something which was not God was alone believed to be near. We may reverently and gratefully follow the Divine Hand in this emancipation of our race from an initiatory false step. As has been said above, the thought of God as only far away was partly due, probably, to man's proper feeling of his own corruption, but was also traceable to his ascription to the Divine Being of human, limited attributes. Through the overruling of God Himself, as we may reverently believe, the initiatory step was in time shown to be false, by its

leading to scepticism in regard to every kind of experience. There came to be realised that God, though far away in condition, is near in His being and His care, and that all may perceive Him. When this was realised, Literalism was necessarily found to be a light but poorly fitted for the circumstances in which man is placed.

The master-thinker with whose name this emancipation deserves to be principally associated is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (born 1770). We have nothing to do here with the rightness or the wrongness of that illustrious man's views regarding history, or with the capabilities of diverse interpretation which may attach to his expressions in regard to the nature of the Divine Being. The one point of interest here is that this man excelled all others in the work of restoring the recognition of the simple truth that *God is to be asserted, not proved*. He taught that God is presupposed in all knowledge. He taught that God is as certain as the world or the self—that we do not need messages from afar to assure us of Him, because He has never left us.

Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher (born 1768), though approaching the subject in a different way from that of the great philosopher, and disagreeing with him in many particulars, combined with him

in establishing the new standing-ground. He taught that man can approach God through a sense (*Gefühl*) which arises within him, making him conscious that he is "absolutely dependent" (*schlechthin abhängig*). This sense, he maintained, secures to us the existence and presence of God, because nothing but God could produce it. Schleiermacher thus supplemented Hegel, by calling attention to a sense of God on the part of each individual. Such a sense is assuredly a fact, and is not to be identified with the metaphysical certainty that God exists. On the other hand, Schleiermacher viewed this sense too much as a mere feeling, and too little as an organ of knowledge. God is not merely known indirectly as the cause of the sense, but becomes, through the sense, the object, to an extent, of direct perception. In maintaining that He is the cause of our feeling rather than the object of our perception, Schleiermacher plainly sought to avoid detracting from the incomprehensibleness of the Divine Spirit in His eternal action.¹ But such detracting can be better avoided by a grasp of the idea of revelation, as involving that God becomes merely relatively an object of knowledge to individuals. Here, however, there was again brought forward the fact that God

¹ *Christliche Glaube*, Einleitung, p. 20.

is not, in His being, removed entirely from the soul. Thus Hegel and Schleiermacher supplemented each other. The one brought out that God may be asserted as the presupposition of all knowledge; the other brought out that in each individual there is a sense whereby he may attain to a definite knowledge of God, or to a knowledge of God as affecting and related to himself.

The more it has been realised that God is near, as well as far off, and that He may be known in individual experience, the more has Literalism been proved to be an unsuitable defining agency. It is on account of this, therefore, in the first place, that a better light has been specially sought, and has been found. But along with the processes that produced dissatisfaction with Literalism itself, there worked other processes. Other processes were producing dissatisfaction with the objects, or aspects of objects, which were disclosed by Literalism. Of these objects, or aspects, some account was given in the first chapter. As to the processes, one of them requires special notice. That is, the criticism of the letter, not only of the creeds, but of the Bible itself, by moral and intellectual ideals. The work of Biblical Criticism has brought little thanks to those who have at all publicly engaged in it. But it is

work of clearing away error, in order that the truth may be more purely seen. And now in the minds of thoughtful people, the very unpopularity which cleaves to it, may surely well blunt, instead of sharpening, the gibes which they may incline to cast at its agents. The German critical students—even those of them who are most spiritual, most religious, and most distinctly Christian in standpoint—have now for long been targets for severe animadversion. Nevertheless one cannot rightly view the purification which has taken place in our time in regard to the understanding of the gospel, without recognising that these men have made an important contribution to it. We, of all shades of thought, who cling to the gospel, are now, more or less, enjoying an emancipation from false and confusing notions, which these workers, at the expense of much endurance, have eminently helped to obtain for us.

Almost contemporaneously with the discovery that Literalism is indeed deficient—before, rather than after—the better light has been found. Does any one here repeat the question, Is there any need of a new particular light; may we not, as we realise that we possess a power of perception, be now independent of any defining agency other than the

continuing light of the Divine Presence itself? But to this is to be answered, in accordance with what has already been pointed out, that we, struggling finite beings, are not independent of the historical attainments of our world, and that we are not strong enough to dispense with the particular aid which they present to us. The light which is now around us, for definite guidance, is the light of Christian Influences.

It is beyond the pretensions of this book to follow the emergence of the newer light as it has appeared generally in Europe, or to specify the individuals most connected with it. Let us put aside even such a question as this : Whether Britain has learned from Germany, or one 'Spirit of the Age' has caused the advance all over. It will be enough for the purpose before us here, to name a few theologians who have been specially illumined by this newer agency in Britain, choosing only those whose recognition as of importance is sufficiently general and who are sufficiently removed from the present time, to secure us from delicacy in the selection. For this we must enter on another chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME SPECIALLY ILLUMINED IN BRITAIN.

THE later illumining agency of Christianity has increased towards its full power very gradually. And also, as changes in connection with religion are generally viewed for some time with distrust, even the illumined themselves have been very slow to acknowledge that a better guiding agency exists at all. Yet in this case the change is just one of clearer perception, involving the removal of errors of vision which were only disturbing. The same objects appear as before; but they are far more truly comprehended, and they are no longer accompanied by shadows which are mistaken for real things.

One group of British theologians have notably perceived sacred facts through the more subtle guidance of Christian Influences, while remaining themselves hardly aware of being no longer guided by Literalism.

At the head of the group¹ are three, namely, Thomas Erskine, John Macleod Campbell, and Alexander John Scott. These were three personal friends, all Scotchmen; and they spoke almost, as it were, with one voice.

Erskine was born in 1788. An advocate by profession, he attained to a leisure admitting of much theological study, through the inheritance of a family estate named Linlathen. He wrote a number of short treatises, of which the earliest was published in 1820. After his death his maturest thoughts were given to the public in a collection of essays entitled "The Spiritual Order and other Papers," which he had desired to have published. He died in 1870.

Campbell was born in 1800. He was ordained minister of the parish of Row on the Firth of Clyde in 1825, but was deposed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1831, on the ground of his having taught that the pardon of God is (in some

¹ It may be hardly necessary to state that this chapter makes no claim to direct knowledge of the theologians whom it introduces, such as may still be available to many by means of relatives or others who had personal acquaintance with them. Their testimony to sacred truth is gratefully interwoven here, as gathered from their works and memorials, which it is now the privilege of the general public to possess.

sense) for all, and that an assurance¹ of personal salvation is closely connected with faith. He was afterwards for many years minister of an independent congregation in Glasgow. He published, among other works, *The Nature of the Atonement*, in 1856. He died in 1872.

Scott was born in 1805. Like Campbell, he studied for the ministry of the Established Church of Scotland, and became a licensed preacher. After some time, however, on being offered the charge of a Scotch congregation in England, he openly refused to give the required signature to the Church's Confession of Faith. He accordingly came into collision with the authorities, and was ejected from his office by the same Assembly as deposed Campbell. Afterwards he became eminent in England as Professor of Philosophy in Owens College, Manchester. He has left some fragments, in which his theological views are clearly and forcibly stated. He died in 1866.

In the writings of all these three men, one thought is continually recurring. It is this: that it is wrong to say, God loves man in consequence of the atonement made by Christ, and right to say, rather, the

¹ Significance of this point indicated in *Memorials of Campbell*, ii. 17-18.

atonement was made in consequence of the fact that God loves man.

At first sight, this seems just one of those abstract considerations of which the old Theology was full. And the opinion that it is so may find support from the writings of Erskine and Campbell in general, in which there is much that seems little removed from the old abstract way of thinking. But on further examination, the thought will be seen to be an indication of the great change of consciousness as to standing-ground, which was specified in last chapter. It is an indication of the discovery that God is near, and that He may be directly perceived.

When this is discovered, and then alone, one learns that God indeed cares for all, and that His care is eternal and unchanging; that, accordingly, nothing was ever needed to induce Him to love His feeble and lost children, because He had never ceased to love them.

That this was at the back of the thought of which those three theologians made so much, becomes the plainer when one notices that they all showed themselves alive to the true content of the idea of revelation. Erskine, even in his earliest period, emphatically pointed to a centre of faith which was not in a 'particular act,' but in "the character of God

revealed in Christ—the character of holy love—consuming sin, and saving the sinner.”¹ And his earliest book was directed towards showing that, at least, part of the evidence for the truth of a revelation was to be found in the response of the soul itself.² So Campbell, starting with the atonement regarded as a historical event, claimed for it that it revealed that ‘God is love.’³ And he brought out that ‘conscience’ might apprehend not only man’s sinful state, which ‘revelation’ asserted to exist, but also the truth of the “forgiving love of God,” of which there is “manifestation”⁴ in the atonement. And, once more, Scott, speaking of the Scriptures and putting side by side with them other means of revelation, said : “Thereby God utters His Being to us, as an author makes known his existence and form of mind by his book ; and as a friend by his letter expresses the state of his heart towards us, and seeks communion with ours.”⁵ And he also was alive to the importance of the part taken by the ‘spiritual understanding’ or ‘insight’ of the receiving mind.⁶

The three developed their thoughts along lines on which we cannot stop to follow them. One formal

¹ *Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*, pp. 43, 169, 3rd edit.

² *Remarks on the Internal Evidence, etc.* (now republished).

³ *Nature of the Atonement*, p. 62.

⁴ *Ib.*, ch. i.

⁵ *Discourses*, p. 35.

⁶ *Ib.*, pp. 54, 55.

point only demands notice. It is that, as against certain popular fancies in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, they eagerly asserted a unity of attributes in all three 'personas' of the one God. This is a simple extension of the thought which has been alluded to above. One God was to their view eternally as had been revealed in Jesus.

It is to be recognised that they remained, in spite of their better discernment, under the partial guidance of Literalism. They did not appreciate the aspect of the Bible in which it is regarded as a number of different individual expressions, involving local, temporal, and personal elements. And Erskine and Campbell showed themselves positively offended at the early steps taken by Biblical Criticism, especially that of Bishop Colenso.¹ Yet how far they were really above Literalism and independent of it, is shown clearly by the teaching to which reference has just been made. It is well illustrated by this remark of Campbell, which his biographer has made public: "Mr. Erskine used to say that 'one knowing God could afford to give Him back all His promises, and trust to what He is.'"²

Consequent on their partial adherence to Literal-

¹ *Letters of Erskine*, ii. 146, etc.

² *Memorials of Campbell*, ii. 133.

ism, however, there was, in the earlier time especially, a mingling of older views with newer, which caused an undeniable confusedness in their thought.

Thus much disappointment may be occasioned by meeting in a published sermon of Campbell's such a sentence as this: "There shall be no voice saying in that hour, 'Fear not,' for Christ will not then come in mercy. He comes for judgment: and it shall be said, 'Depart, ye cursed.' Oh, what different words to come from the lips of God, 'Fear not,' and 'Depart, ye cursed.'"¹ To be content with the conceptions here expressed, would be to fall back from the better standpoint that the three theologians had reached. But Campbell is not to be judged by sentences like these. Ever and again asserting itself amid his conscientious attempts to follow traditional ways of thought, there meets us, in his works, a glow of spiritual vitality, a warmth of soul, that can only have come from a rare discernment of that Presence that is merciful always.² He saw God in the light not merely of Literalism but of influence from the life of Jesus; and the thoughts to which he attained in consequence were too great for himself to develop.

¹ *Good Tidings*, etc., p. 160.

² Specially seen in letter on Colenso, published in *Memorials*, ii.

A less noticeable but more thoroughgoing confusion, attaching to Erskine's thoughts as well as Campbell's, was an unconscious entanglement in presuppositions. In asserting their right to discern the eternal character of God as revealed in the historical life of Jesus, they claimed for the human mind a power of verifying its own religious faith. Yet, strangely enough, they did not make clear how the life of Jesus had been a medium of revelation at all. They seemed just to presuppose that it had been so, in virtue of Jesus having been incarnate God, as the Church had taught. Now one is driven to ask, Why stop the verifying process at reading the eternal through the historical? Why not make sure also that in the historical itself there is that attribute or quality which the vision claims to find extended to the Eternal? There was surely danger in this procedure of laying oneself open to the charge of merely deducing a rational ground of faith from what, after all, was accepted blindly. Besides this, there was the danger of readers, and perhaps also themselves, presupposing not merely the essential truth which had been in the doctrine of the Incarnation, but also the very errors which they were denying. These errors were the limitation of the act of atonement to a point of time and the imagination

that God the Creator was different in character from God the Son as appearing in Jesus. Though these errors do not belong to the orthodox doctrine as properly regarded, yet in the traditional grasp of that doctrine they had largely been present. And Erskine, Campbell, and Scott failed to recognise that they could not be removed without starting at the root question of whether and how there had at all taken place a revelation in Jesus. There was necessary, beyond what they attempted, that the unique character and personality of Jesus should be, in some brief way, set forth as a certain historical fact, and that it should be shown how in these by themselves the revelation had been granted, and the discernment of the Eternal had been aroused.

As far as appears from their principal published works, neither Campbell nor Scott made much advance towards escape from these confusions. As regards those stupefying terrors that chiefly darkened the guidance of Literalism, there seems little solid difference, at least in Campbell's position, from that of *Arminianism*, which leaves undenied the everlasting repudiation of many by the Most High, but refers that to the fatal exercise, on the part of the rejected, of their miserable 'free-wills.' It was otherwise with Erskine. Living to a great age, this

truly devout man beheld within his own mind, in great measure, the full bloom of his ideas as well as the bud. In his early work, *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*,¹ he had explained away the possible issue of his doctrine in that of universal salvation. In his last work he earnestly assumed a nobler attitude. He there ascribed to the Apostle Paul, and plainly claimed for himself, "the belief that it is the purpose of God to draw all men to true righteousness, and that this purpose will most surely be accomplished in the case of every individual."² In this work also he advanced considerably in the direction of restoring the idea of the Trinity in the Godhead from the Tritheism into which it had, through Literalism, more or less fallen. And finally, he set forth in it a doctrine with which his name ought to be of all things associated. This was that the continued stings of conscience, so far from suggesting that we are repulsive to God, are really showing His continual care over us. "It is a memorable moment," he said, "in the history of a man's spirit when the righteousness of God ceases to be a ground of anxiety or apprehension, and becomes

¹ Pp. 60, 208, 3rd edition.

² *Spiritual Order, etc.*, p. 111. (In republication of *Unconditional Freeness, etc.*, the original explaining away is not found.)

a ground of assured hope and confidence.”¹ He stated, re-stated, and developed this sublime doctrine to such an extent as entitles him to rank with the greatest theologians of any age, if not, indeed, to stand within the company of the world’s prophets. Erskine’s last book is fitted to bring health to many a wounded spirit, and new zest to many a wearied struggler against evil. And in this special doctrine, he has opened up one of the commonest facts of experience so as to show there the presence of the Creator and Redeemer.

Ideas similar to those of Erskine, Campbell, and Scott—the result, evidently, of similar perceptions—were entertained and convincingly expressed by the famous preacher Frederick W. Robertson, of the Church of England, in Brighton, and by Alexander Ewing, Bishop of Argyll in connection with the Scotch Episcopal Church. The latter stated his thoughts in serenity of confidence and with liveliness of diction in a series of discourses called “Revelation Considered as Light,”—published just after his death in 1873.

Again, ideas virtually the same either descended to or were independently acquired by John Frederick Denison Maurice, born in 1805. He was a clergyman of the Church of England, and for some time was

¹ *Spiritual Order*, p. 67.

Professor of Theology in King's College, London. He was deprived of this professorship on account of his views. With Maurice, as with the rest, the pure idea of God as the Eternal and Unchangeable was asserted as against all limiting fancies. "A Gospel," he said, "is the unveiling or discovery to men of a common Head."¹ And he advanced on the others to the extent of being more positive and fuller in regard to certain details. He earnestly rejected and combated the notion that there is no hope beyond the grave for those who remain lost till death is reached. He also jealously defended the union in all attributes of the 'Son' 'Person' in the Godhead with the 'Father,' involving an unvarying character of loving-kindness in one transcendent Being. Yet he was not delivered from Literalism. And accordingly his way of purifying the idea of the Trinity in the Godhead was by adopting a procedure both arbitrary and inefficient. Seeking to be rid of all that would separate the 'Son' 'Person' from the one Eternal, he adopted a most curious procedure. He maintained that the Gospel of John really tells of an Eternal, the "Life" "which has been the light of men in all ages," that this Eternal was once for all 'manifested' in Jesus, and that the truth

¹ Preface to the *Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. xv.

of His existence recommends itself apart from literary evidence. Taking these thoughts, next, as principles, he required that the first three gospels should be read 'in the light' of these principles. "The theology of the fourth gospel," he added, "will be the key to their history."¹ But this was quite to fail in doing justice either to the differences of presentation between the first three gospels and the fourth, or to the question regarding the Divine and the human in Jesus Christ. It was to take up the 'key' and the 'light' for inner mysteries without first giving due observation to that which was at hand and before the eyes. It was not to weave into one intelligent system the doctrine of the Trinity along with the truth of the really human nature of Jesus and the actual earthly occurrences, but merely to push these last two matters impatiently away.

As an individual member of the group, Maurice may be said to have been characterised by two qualities. First, he showed a practical interest more searching than had appeared, at least before he came forward, in the works of the three Scotchmen. To him belongs the credit, more peculiarly than to the others, of seriously facing the doctrine of everlasting misery, and grappling with it in behalf of

¹ Preface to the *Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. xxxv.

his living brethren of mankind. Perhaps this greater thoroughness in practical interest may have a connection with his having belonged to the English portion of the British people. Second, he showed an extraordinary bias towards the reconciliation of opposing views. This perhaps may, in some small measure, be connected with the fact that his father had been a Unitarian minister. Thus, thrusting from him with horror the fancy of endless pain, he nevertheless maintained that there is such a thing as 'eternal death,' from which God saves all. "What dream of ours," he said, "can reach to the assertion of St. John, that Death and Hell themselves shall be cast into the lake of fire? I cannot fathom the meaning of such expressions. But they are written; I accept them, and give thanks for them. I feel there is an abyss of Death, into which I may sink and be lost. Christ's gospel reveals an abyss of Love below that; I am content to be lost in that."¹ It was in accordance with this that, while firmly believing in a Second Person in the Godhead, he was perhaps even more than the others alive to the tendency in popular conceptions of the Trinity to degenerate into belief in three Deities, and that he recognised the force of criticisms which had been

¹ *Theological Essays*, p. 442.

directed against the doctrine of the Trinity in consequence of such degeneration. And again, in the same zeal for reconciliation, he imputed those errors which he had to acknowledge as existing in connection with the orthodox doctrines, not to the doctrines themselves, but to wrong representations of them. He would not allow that prevailing notions, which might more or less represent the Church-ideas, were really these ideas in their essentials. Speaking of "the popular notion of miracles," he said of those who were "eager to uphold" that notion, "Before they charge any who dissent from it as heretics, they should consider carefully whether they are orthodox."¹ And speaking generally, he said: "What is called a popular view expands or contracts much at the pleasure of writers in newspapers and reviews. It appears to be exceedingly definite; you approach it, it has almost vanished."² In Maurice, as in Campbell, there showed itself an emotional condition—a genial self-repression and esteem for others—which, as powerfully as his distinct ideas, gave proof of his being led closely by higher than literalistic influences.³

¹ Preface to the *Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven*, p. xi.

² *Theological Essays*, p. 314.

³ *Life*, by his son.

Charles Kingsley (born 1819) was neither so subtle nor so profound a thinker as, perhaps, any of those who have just been mentioned; but he was a teacher second to none of them. He had a power, amounting to genius, in the way of summing up the truths which had been newly discovered. In the whole history of Christian thought subsequent to the apostolic times, probably nothing more arresting has been written than the phrase used by him, "not your way or my way, but God's way,"¹ and his sentence regarding men put into the mouth of one of the characters in his novel *Two Years Ago*, "The more you see of them the less you trust them, and yet the more you see of them the more you like them."² These two utterances may be as effective as close reasoning, in driving away the shadows of Literalism and bringing back the terrified soul into the presence of a Heavenly Father. Everything that Kingsley said he said with force and passion. He thus did not escape from strongly attacking things which deserved little attack. But, on the other hand, he justly raised a powerful arm against many forms of surreptitious error, and against all that obscures from weary and distracted souls the countenance of the Most Kind.

¹ Quoted by Hughes, *Letters and Memories of Kingsley*, by his wife (abridged edit.), p. 64.

² Chap. x., p. 167 in edit. 1887.

Kingsley had another distinction among those theologians of the newer light besides his downright force of statement. This was his bold advocacy of the Divine in Nature. The restoration, indeed, of pure ideas of God is itself enough to disclose His life in Nature as well as in Morality. But Kingsley became a special spokesman for Nature. He spoke on its behalf with a fearlessness which only one who also was an undoubted devotee of Morality could have adopted. His claims to greatness as a religious teacher would be secured if it were for nothing else than the excellence of the balance, so to speak, which is found in his utterances between the peculiar kinds of authority possessed over us by Nature and by Morality respectively. One cannot well imagine a happier summing up of the state of the case between Morality and Nature than is found in these two propositions, the one directly written by him, and the other given by one who knew him, as expressing a belief which 'penetrated' his thought, namely, "That his (man's) only welfare lies in living after the likeness of God"¹; and "That the world . . . was God's world, and that everything which He had made was good."²

¹ *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. ii. p. 320.

² *Letters and Memories*, p. 121 of abridged edition.

One more of this same group of theologians is sufficiently long established as an influence to be mentioned, though he belongs also to the present time. This is George Macdonald (born 1824), who has expressed similar ideas through the vehicle of novels. He is more of a Utopian than any of the others; but his fancies are a mere idiosyncrasy, and do not take away from the general excellence of his spiritual perceptions. These are two sayings of this most suggestive leader of religious thought, taken from among many others not less striking: "No human being has ever been allowed to occupy the position of a pure benefactor. The receiver has his turn, and becomes the giver"¹; and, "The leaves were still thick upon the trees, but most of them had changed to gold, and brown, and red; and the sweet faint odours of those that had fallen, and lay thick underfoot, ascended like a voice from the grave, saying, 'Here dwelleth some sadness but no despair.'"²

While a plain movement has thus been taking place among a group of theologians of similar standpoint to one another, and all claiming to be in the lines of the traditional faith, the thought of certain others

¹ *Robert Falconer*, p. 255.

² *David Elginbrod*, p. 265.

who have cared less about the claim of union with the traditional, has converged to meet that movement, and has advanced alongside of it. Thus thinkers entirely separated from one another by the passwords of ancient religious parties are found united in the perception of new aspects, which they almost name in the same way. It is enough for the purpose before us here to notice this fact without attempting to go deeply into it. It would hardly be excusable, in this chapter, to omit to mention the powerful name of Martineau. And it would be invidious and sectarian to pass over the name of Francis William Newman. Though these two thinkers occupy intellectual positions which many might refuse to associate with the term 'evangelical,' they have each a separate lofty message, and they both have an essential kinship of perception to the more professedly conservative writers who form the group just mentioned. All devout persons may well show honour towards men of intellect so brilliant and of piety so fervent.

It remains to add that, beyond definite expressions of religious teaching, an indistinct but undeniable perception in the newer light is indicated by much of the poetry and novel-literature of the earlier part of the century. How far there is prophecy in our

poetry, is a subject quite beyond the range on which these pages would enter. But to the secular novel-literature as containing both results from and helps towards religious advance, a passing tribute may be paid. Sir Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and others imply in their writings, and help to spread, an apprehension of Nature, Morality, and the Gospel, not as viewed by means of Literalism, but to a great extent as this sketch has endeavoured to describe them. The Nature which they involve is a Nature capable of being carried piece by piece along the moral path; the Morality is a region in which one is beckoned onwards by a winning ideal of integrity, aspiration, and care for others; and the gospel is no compromise between God and human imperfection, but a message borne through the air, heard by the sense of senses, declaring that there is One ever better than our best thoughts, lifting where we utterly fail, never to be comprehended, but always to be trusted.¹

¹ Example:—

“Once upon a time,” said Richards, “there was a lady—a very good lady, and her little daughter dearly loved her.”

“A very good lady, and her little daughter dearly loved her,” repeated the child.

“Who when God thought it right that it should be so, was taken ill, and died.”

The child shuddered.

More is not to be said regarding individuals, as much addition would mean treading too near our own time. There are others, who have appeared and exercised influence during the last fifty years; and it is not in want of appreciation that they are not mentioned.

Towards the complete establishment of the better guidance there is still much work to do. And an unpleasant part of the work that remains is the temporarily destructive action of showing the untruth of many of the combinations discovered by Literalism, or, in other words, criticising popular notions and even, with these, the detail presented by the letter of the creeds and of the Bible itself. Those who now are pointing to positive sacred truth have often, as they go along, to accomplish also a disillusioning process. But painful as is the subjection to misunderstanding which results from this, Biblical Criticism is ultimately serving truth and spiritual peace. As it advances side by side with the thought

“Died, never to be seen again by any one on earth, and was buried in the ground where the trees grow.”

“The cold ground,” said the child, shuddering again.

“No! The warm ground,” returned Polly, seizing her advantage, “where the ugly little seeds turn into beautiful flowers, and into grass, and corn, and I don’t know what all besides. Where good people turn into bright angels, and fly away to Heaven.”—DICKENS, *Dombey and Son* (see John xii. 24).

which began with Erskine, Kingsley, Martineau, and the others, the life of a personal human soul will gain vastly in attractiveness, even as at the same time there will be shown ever more clearly that it is moving along on firm ground, never to be wrested from under it.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

“THE supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture.” These words, from the Confession of Faith subscribed by the clergy of the Church of Scotland, may be said to express the earlier Protestant position. The newer Protestant position, though one might find a fresh and simpler statement of it, indicates no essential departure from the earlier as this assertion defines it. The difference between the earlier and the later may be said to lie in the applications which individuals have made of this assertion. One has to admit, indeed, that in every probability the framers of the statement had in their own minds the bias which led to the earlier application. Yet both the words and

the essence of the thought allow the newer. And the newer is the more natural of the two. The difference is that the earlier Protestants emphasised the phrase "speaking in the scripture," whereas those of the later position remove the emphasis to the two sacred words which immediately precede that phrase.

This is all the formal difference which is brought about by freely allowing the newer light to shine on the objects of faith. And if the material difference is a much vaster one, the material change is in the direction not of loss for any sympathetic person, but of firm and limitless hope for mankind.

Yet the newer position is still by many bitterly resented. And they who, in gratefulness, ask others to share with them its assurance and its interests, are met by determined and aggrieved resistance.

Why should this be so? Is the explanation to be found in a dread of the unknown and untried? Dread is, in this case, in all ways a wrong feeling. It indicates distrust in the presence of voices that themselves demand confidence. And it is condemned under all sober observation. All right estimation of the past as recorded, and of the future as promised by the newer position, encourages hope, not dread.

To begin with the consideration of Morality. All earnest persons wish, first of all, to see the moral

life of mankind preserved. And, as has been recognised above, there has indeed under Literalism been made a great moral achievement, which requires that we jealously guard it. But for the preservation of so much moral life as has been attained, there exists a mighty security in the very achievement itself which was made in the days of the old guiding agency. The very substance of that achievement is a triumphant discovery by the human race of the path of Morality—such a discovery of it that they can never possibly abandon it while their reason lasts.

There is no danger, therefore, of slipping back morally. And surely there is room for much advance morally. The achievement under Literalism went only a little way. It left prevalent, in place of moral action, a large body of action of a very opposite character.

All earnest adorers of the character of Jesus Christ will combine in the wish for some contrast between the future and the past. They will be at one in desiring that many kinds of action which were produced in the old days may never be seen again. While in truth the entry on the moral path was made signally in the time of the old light, the early attempts at a moral application were in great measure such as all enthusiasts for rectitude can

now only view with pain and amazement. There were indeed, in the past, exalted and heroic individuals; but the situation must be viewed generally. Taking the facts either *a priori* or *a posteriori*, there is an intense contrast between the past and that future which every Christian must desire. Looked at *a priori*, the moral action of the past was, broadly speaking, a blind fleeing from Nature; and it was pursued in strange confusion as to what was the character of Him who was to be approached and served. Looked at *a posteriori*, the past showed noble self-denial in many cases; but it also showed hatred, fiendish cruelty at the hands of the most zealous, bloody warfare on every side, corruption of domestic manners surviving the efforts at reform, unscrupulousness in vilifying opponents, coarse strife, and savage abuse.

The supporters of the newer position claim that a vast change for the better is already taking place in actual morals, and that, in virtue of the purer influences which are now coming into the ascendant, there will be consummated an improvement which will worthily succeed the first entry into the moral path which has taken place in Christian times. They claim that in the present and in the opening future there is appearing a love of purity, of lofty integrity,

and of delicacy, along with a spirit of care for others, alive in private and ramifying into public schemes of self-sacrificing kindness between man and man, such as no record of past time shows even a dream of, such as suggests no period to be dreaded, but a period of entry on a golden age.

Now some may plead that it is a mere coincidence that the improvement is coming at the same time as the newer position for faith, and that to the old guidance belongs the credit of the better action, late as it has been in producing it. And they may point, in support of this, to the fact, freely and heartily to be admitted, that many who are foremost in carrying into practice the schemes of self-sacrifice and philanthropy are of the old way of perceiving. To this there might be answered, to begin with, that one cannot hastily make sure of what are all the secret forces which are leading those who professedly cling to the old. It is hardly profitable, however, to discuss this question as it stands. What affects us is this modification of it, Which guidance can most reasonably be expected to sustain the improvement in the future? And in answering this there can be no hesitation. One cannot have so great an enthusiasm for helping the degraded and the out-cast, or even for advancing in self-control and

temperance, when one believes that God is limited in His care, and that man is left to make the best of a compact offered on hard, fast lines, as when one perceives that the Almighty Himself is working for us in ways beyond comprehension, and that He is ever bending to aid the lost with a care of which that felt by the most sympathetic man or woman is the feeblest reflection.

So much for Morality. What of Nature? Nature was almost entirely ignored in the old position, whereas the newer brings it within the range of religious interest. And this is surely a priceless gain. Apart from what has been noticed above, of the secret leadings which appear within Nature unexpectedly, it is proved altogether to be a force so powerful either for good or for evil, that it requires, not ignoring, but special consideration. Now a new clearness of outlook is reached when the forces of Nature are regarded no longer as encumbrances of piety, but as material fitted to be applied to lofty ends. Not that even the better leading can promise any easy, unruffled state of things. The antagonism between the moral and the natural regions will not entirely cease, and the adjusting of their respective relations to us will ever be a work in which human weakness may cause failure. But the clearer under-

standing will dispel confusion, and will lessen the danger of falling helpless between what seem to be rival claims. A new *temperance* will establish itself. And of that there are ample signs. It may still have different stages, of changing bias, being one time too negligent of the material, another time almost forgetful of the central aim. So at a time one may attempt to carry too much of Nature along the moral path, while again one may be leaving important helps unused. But if thus the earnest life will still know struggle and pain, it will move in view of an ideal and of a strength, in the power of which it will ever more and more prevail.

Neither Morality nor Nature, however, exhausts the life of man. What of the knowledge of God as the Overruler? what of the gospel?

The Bible has proclaimed the gospel. Yet Literalism but meagrely spread the knowledge of it. It was apprehended in spite of, rather than with the help of, that guidance. Understood as good tidings to the human race from the Supreme, the gospel did not hold a truly sovereign place either in the preaching or in the faith which was found while Literalism remained in the ascendant. The gospel was almost out of sight. Preachers, instead of setting forth a refuge from the appalling

facts of Nature, insisted on the belief in new horrors before which those of Nature paled. The added modification, that a few might be saved, was but as a small white spot on a large dark sheet: it left the eye resting on the hopeless announcement for the majority. What virtually took the place of the gospel was little else than a crystallisation of the most despairing human thought that ever flowed out of the dread of what is beyond the grave. If there was a gospel, it was only plain in reference to some isolated individuals; and there was no way of consistently relating it to the multitude who might be dear to those individuals and of whom they were fellow-members. The glory of the dominion of Literalism was purely moral; as regards faith its devotees were steeped in poverty. Such brightness as they may have discerned individually can only have come to them through moving out into the eternal light, or through remembering the spirit of Jesus Christ in contrast to the cold precision of the written standards.

But the gospel is clearly seen under the Christian influences—as it was seen by Isaiah, by the Psalmists, and by the Apostle Paul. And certainty is affixed to it, because it is no mere external report, carried from man to man by pen or human testimony, but is rooted

in the being of the Eternal, and is heard anew on every day and in every place.

The gospel in the newer light does not remove the sterner messages which are borne along the moral path from God to the careless liver. No; for some persons it does this less than did the gospel in the old light of Europe. Under that other, there seemed to be a promise to some of complete exemption from punishment; under the newer guidance there is to no one any such promise. According to all experience, that of the highest discernment included, men and women are punished universally; and while some bear the punishment of others as well as their own, none escape suffering for their own misdeeds in the end. Literalism threw confusion on this as on many other facts; but a revived gospel will make it plain and certain again. God does not—His perceived character assures us—promise complete exemption to a few, and unspeakable endurance to the rest. He promises to all that “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”; and yet He declares that He overrules in such a way that there is eternal forgiveness, and that out of the punishment will grow a free gift of peace and of power to serve others.

Nor is the gospel in the newer light to be discerned

by the careless observer. It can only be clearly perceived through living in nearness to God. And they that have once seen it almost lose sight of it, if they neglect God. The firm intuition of the Divine kindness and care is only attainable through frequent spiritual communion. A loose hold on it may indeed prevail for long in the case of those whose duty takes them into continued outward action. But all who would feel certain of God and of their own salvation must return at times to a nearer vision. And this can only be done through an earnest, humble, self-abasing search. It has been so in all ages. It will ever be so in this world.

But the message shines clearly, and is distinctly discerned. By many and many it is seen in rare moments when other resources fail. To all there is an eternal assurance that in seeking they will find it. *It is a message of no new horror, but of surpassing, overpowering goodness.*

Are literalists really in so perfect a light that they can afford to despise the hope of one superior? Evils of all kinds threaten us all as human beings. For many of these evils Literalism shows no remedy. Those, on the other hand, who perceive in the later light, testify that there is disclosed to them One who, in adorable graciousness, has prepared a cure for

every evil. What defence, then, can be made for the action of resistance ?

Resistance cannot prevail in the end. And indeed it is effecting ultimately an indirect good. For the most self-blaming and unworthy, once really illumined, cannot forget their experience. So that by opposition they are only driven to closer search, to keener prayer, which brings new confirmation.

But for the time the resistance is doing harm. And it is causing pain which is at least as bad to bear as the discomfort of interference with long-cherished notions, regarding which such outcries are made. The arrogant and contemptuous dismissals which new movements meet on so many sides cannot but alarm those who are weaker in vision, and cause new depression to those who are advanced in experience. Few earnest inquirers are likely to escape being affected by the loud aspersions of their guiding power which are so lavishly made, even though these are accompanied by the proffer only of that guidance whose limitations and whose faultiness they know so well.¹ Here are a number of persons who have discovered an unassailable ground of faith, in which decay, partings, and death become transformed into

¹ Very interesting in this connection is Michelet's *Life of Luther* (translated), p. 65.

promise. They are met with the reproach of having lost faith, and of being destroyers of faith. Must this still continue? Let those who believe in Literalism thoroughly—who have apprehended God through it, and known no other sacred force—walk according to their light. But would that those whose faith in Literalism has become but small might not, by their inert support of established modes of speech, continue to obscure the prospect of their brethren, who, alive in sympathy to human need, are straining to see the One Satisfier under a guidance which discloses ‘beauty for ashes.’

Dread might excuse this resistance. But the dread is opposing itself to influences which are to be trusted before all else. Against the dread are influences bearing those very marks of purity and loftiness which are the surest credentials of Divine origin. Let us indeed dread such leadings as, after deliberation, we can ascribe to our own vanity or to our own corrupt faculties. But the leading of the newly active Christian influences is not of such a kind. Hope and grateful confidence, not dread, are the sentiments which the outlook legitimately inspires. Religion must in the future immensely magnify and extend its power. It will do so when the general thoughts about it are no longer as a

“house divided against itself,” now trustful and again terrified, but are at one with themselves, always aspiring, always reproofing, and always trusting. It will do so when the many realise that He is present who calls us out of degradation, in a ‘loving-kindness’ which is ‘new every morning,’ and that there is no other power in experience so certain as He.

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